PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 303

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
15 December—22 December 1997

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15 December 1997

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 303**

TENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 15 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Lone Parents (Income Support)

1. **Mr. Hancock:** How many lone parents she estimates will be in receipt of income support in each of the next three financial years. [19057]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): The new deal for lone parents will enable lone mothers to be independent and return to work. New estimates of the number of lone parents in receipt of income support are expected to be available in spring 1998. Present estimates, not taking into account the new deal for lone parents, for the next three financial years are £1.054 million in 1997–98, £1.044 million in 1998–99 and £1.054 million in 1999–2000.

Mr. Hancock: I am grateful for the Minister's reply. If those figures are not reduced by at least 50 per cent., will not his welfare-to-work programme for single parents, by his own admission, have failed miserably? Why on earth take the benefit away from nearly 1 million single parents who will be sadly disadvantaged by his actions?

Mr. Bradley: It is clearly not acceptable that more than 1 million lone mothers have to rely on income support. The new deal will help them to return to work with the support of personal advisers, job search, education and training throughout the process of moving from benefit into work. As a result, we hope that more than 2 million children will be better off.

Mr. Fallon: Why are Social Security Ministers so defensive about this Treasury-driven cost cutting? If they really are new Labour, why do they not take a pride in the new compulsion?

Mr. Bradley: It is not a cost-cutting measure driven by the Treasury: it is positive support for lone parents to help them to return to work. The new deal will give help through the personal adviser to ensure that lone parents get full support in all matters to overcome the barriers that are stopping them returning to work.

Ms Abbott: The Minister will be aware that the published information about the new deal for lone parents says that, in the test areas, more than 8,000 lone parents were written to, but only 331 have found jobs. Is he certain that the programme will put more lone parents into jobs than might otherwise have been the case?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I am confident that the new deal for lone parents will enable them to find the employment that they are seeking and that the personal advisers will help them to overcome the barriers to work. As the national scheme rolls out in April, many more lone parents will enjoy the benefits of the new deal.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Minister has produced some figures and the hon. Member for Hackney, North and

Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has pointed out the huge gap between those contacted and those who have found work—and we do not know why they have found work. Many people on the new deal have not taken up the offer or even replied to the original letter. The other day, the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) asked the Secretary of State for Social Security a specific question to which she got no real answer. She asked whether the Government have considered introducing compulsion in the new deal, in line with the welfare-to-work proposals, given that there is a problem in the new deal for lone parents and that the extra child benefit for lone parents has been cut. Without any platitudes or nonsense from the Minister that, "It is not our intention" or, "It is not the real issue," I want to know, and the House needs to know—once and for all—whether the Government will introduce compulsion.

Mr. Bradley: We have made it clear that compulsion is not the issue, because the new deal for lone parents will benefit lone parents. It will help them to overcome the barriers to work and ensure that they gain proper employment to provide a better standard of living for themselves and their children.

Pensioners

2. **Mr. Touhig:** If she will make a statement on the Government's policy on raising the living standards of pensioners. [19058]

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women (Ms Harriet Harman): We want today's and tomorrow's pensioners to enjoy security in retirement. In July, I fulfilled one of our manifesto commitments by announcing a wide-ranging review of all aspects of pension provision, but we shall not wait until the outcome of the pensions review to take action. We have already taken action—by increasing the basic state pension to over £100 for pensioner couples from April and by an extra winter fuel payment to all pensioner households, and two and a half times that amount to the poorest pensioners on income support. We have also taken action to tackle the problem of the 1 million pensioners who do not claim the income support to which they are entitled.

Mr. Touhig: I thank my right hon. Friend for her response; all pensioners will welcome what she has done to help them. Does she agree that no one in Britain will believe a Tory party now posing as the friend of the pensioner and of disabled people? Does she further agree that the scare stories we saw at the weekend will best be answered by the Government's comprehensive spending review, which will be governed by fairness and opportunity for all?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. No one will accept the Tories posing as the friend of pensioners or of disabled people—they know better. People know that the welfare state is failing many of those whom it should be helping. As the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said in response to an earlier question, our is not a cuts-driven agenda. Our review will be judged on two clear objectives—getting the right support to people who want to work to enable to them to do so; and getting the right mix of cash and services to people who cannot work, but who need to be enabled to live independently and with dignity. No one is talking about taking away benefits from those who need them—of course we must not do that. That is what the Prime Minister said yesterday, and I am happy to repeat his words to the House today.

Mr. Burns: What assurances can the Secretary of State give to the many thousands of disabled pensioners who are confused and frightened by the leaks emanating from her Department that they face means-testing of, or cuts to, their benefits? I know that she is not that keen on answering straightforward questions, but could we have a yes or no answer? Will she confirm that there are no plans to cut or to tax disability benefits?

Ms Harman: I have already answered the question.

Mr. Burns: No, you have not.

Ms Harman: Yes, I have. Anticipating the hon. Gentleman's question, I said that no one is even talking about taking away benefits from those who need them, disabled or pensioner. That is what the Prime Minister said.

We recognise that we must improve the welfare state, as the status quo is not acceptable. Millions of people who want to work have been written off to a life of dependence on benefit. Many pensioners and people with disabilities who cannot work have not received the right support from the mix of cash and services to enable them to live with independence and dignity. People recognise that the welfare state has failed some of the most vulnerable and needy people. The status quo is not acceptable, and we shall improve the welfare state.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My right hon. Friend will know that many pensioners receive housing benefit and that housing benefit relates to rents paid in a free market. Will she assure me that Ministers in her Department are liaising with Ministers from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in considering the way in which the free market in rents totally distorts the benefits system of the United Kingdom?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend makes an important point, with which I fully agree. It is long overdue for us to ensure that people who need rented accommodation can get affordable, high-quality accommodation. The housing benefit system is complex and provides some people with a disincentive to work. It is not an acceptable system, and it is very much a part of our comprehensive spending review. We are reviewing the system with Ministers from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to make sure that we get it right in terms of people who need the accommodation, our overall housing policy and the public purse. All those issues will be addressed as part of the review.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Instead of asking my intended question, I shall repeat the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), which the Secretary of State did not answer, because she must get in the habit of giving precise answers to precise

questions, rather than trying to bamboozle the House with irrelevant generalities. Are the Government considering means-testing the basic old-age pension? Yes or no?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman should read our manifesto, which says that the basic state pension will continue to be paid universally, as it is now, and to be uprated at least in line with prices. If he reflected, he would probably agree that the welfare state has denied opportunities to people who want to work. That is clearly the case. We must give people with disabilities those opportunities and take touch action to tackle discrimination against them, to ensure that they can work.

We shall ensure that no changes will be made without full consultation. Full consultation is part of our pensions review, and our approach to changing provision for people with disabilities will be exactly the same.

Mr. Winnick: The Tories, with their notorious record, should be the last people to give lectures about pensions and disability. Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind, in any review, that disabled pensioners should not have their disability living allowance means-tested, taxed or worsened in any way? That should apply equally to anyone in the community who is disabled. The Prime Minister said that the disabled would be protected; that is what Labour Members want, and I am sure that that is what will happen. I hope that my right hon. Friend, along with Treasury Ministers, will bear that in mind.

Ms Harman: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend, and I shall certainly bear that in mind. Labour has always stood up for the interests of people with disabilities, unlike the previous Government, who blocked civil rights for disabled people. Labour has always stood up for the poorest and most vulnerable; in our comprehensive review to modernise the welfare state, those traditional concerns will remain at the heart of our agenda.

Lone Parents

3. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** What representations she has received on her proposals to assist lone parents to move from welfare into work. [19059]

Ms Harman: Our new deal, which offers a real opportunity for lone parents, has been widely welcomed outside the House. It has been welcomed by lone parents themselves; by the organisations that represent them, such as Gingerbread and the National Council for One Parent Families; and by the employers, such Total Oil, W. H. Smith and Safeway, who are offering lone parents work. Our £300 million investment in child care has also been welcomed by women throughout the country.

Mr. Simpson: I congratulate the Secretary of State on reading that brief so well, but does she believe in the principle behind what she has just said?

Ms Harman: Of course I agree with the principle that I set out. I have always argued for the concerns of lone parents who have had no choice and have been written off to a life of dependence on benefit. I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new-found and, I am sure, heartfelt concern about lone parents; but lone parents will remember that, when his party was in government all they got was criticism and a life of dependence on benefit, whereas under the new Government they will get child care and opportunities that they never had before.

Mr. Llew Smith: How many people who have visited my right hon. Friend at her surgery have insisted that the Government stick to the Tory spending plans?

Ms Harman: People who visited me at my surgery were desperately concerned that Labour should come into government after so many years in the wilderness and out of office. Those people recognise that we have a mandate to tackle poverty and social exclusion, but to do so by extending opportunities. Many in my constituency would work if they had the chance, the opportunities and the right support. People who have been written off to a life of dependence on benefits are the first to argue that they want support to help them into independence so that they can support themselves and their families instead of having a continuous life on benefits.

Mr. Ian Bruce: As the Secretary of State will know, I used to run an employment agency. *[Interruption.]* I know that the Labour party does not really care about single mums going back to work, but let me give the Secretary of State some practical experience. Single mums often used to take temporary work to get their skills back together. Am I right in thinking that, under the new proposals, after they have worked a single week in a temporary work, they will have to go back to a benefit that does not include the single mother premium?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman will know that we recognise that lone parents often need help to improve their skills and training is very much part of the new deal. Therefore, there will be help for them to be better off than they can be on benefit. Certainly, if they take work and subsequently lose it, they will go back on to the same rate of benefit for their eldest child that a married woman in a jobless household would receive for that child. They will have opportunities that they would never have had before because of the extension of child care and the new deal for lone parents.

Welfare to Work

5. **Fiona Mactaggart:** If she will visit Slough to examine local welfare-to-work initiatives. [19061]

The Minister for Welfare Reform (Mr. Frank Field): Yes, I hope to be in Slough on 19 January.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Minister for his proposed visit to Slough. Does he remember the statements that he made earlier in the summer about the need to listen to what is going on locally as regards social security offices? Will he ensure that local initiatives that prefigure the welfare-to-work and new deal programmes can be built on properly? In Slough, we have such an initiative. It is a partnership between the local authority, local companies led by Mars and the voluntary organisations. He will learn much from that. Can he give me an assurance that such local initiatives will be incorporated in our welfare-to-work plan?

Mr. Field: That is our objective. I must add how helpful I found the correspondence that my hon. Friend

sent me about the scheme operating in Slough. If other hon. Members have such innovatory schemes operating in their constituencies, I hope that they will follow her example and write to me.

Lone Parents

6. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** If she will make it her policy that lone parents who participate in the new deal for lone parents scheme will be paid the minimum wage under the scheme. [19062]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The new deal for lone parents is a pioneering programme that recognises and backs lone parents' desire to work. Those taking jobs with the assistance of the new deal for lone parents will benefit from the national minimum wage.

Mr. Taylor: Will disabled people on the scheme, who work rather than participate in some form of education, be paid the full national minimum wage?

Mr. Bradley: As I have just made clear, those people who participate in the new deal will benefit from the national minimum wage.

Mr. Pike: While I obviously welcome the fact that those people will benefit from the national minimum wage, which is crucial in low-pay areas such as mine, will my hon. Friend assure me that the Department will fully support the Chancellor in the need to remove the anomalies in benefit that at present lead to people losing by getting into work, which is stupid?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he knows, the Chancellor has commissioned a review under Mr. Taylor to look into the tax and benefits systems and the barriers between the two, which are a disincentive for people to remain in work. The report should be produced in the near future. I hope that it will deal with the issue that my hon. Friend identified.

7. **Mr. Baker:** What assessment she has made of the effect on the poorest 10 per cent. of the population of the withdrawal of lone-parent benefit. [19063]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Lone parents are over-represented in the bottom end of the income distribution because they are excluded from work. The best way to help lone parents out of poverty is to address the barriers that stop them working. The Government are addressing those barriers through our new deal for lone parents and our national child care strategy.

Mr. Baker: The poorest 10 per cent. will not be impressed by that answer, because it does not deal with those who are unable to find work—a point consistently made last week. Those who voted Labour on 1 May expecting a tilt towards Robin Hood have a tilt towards the sheriff of Nottingham instead. I ask the Minister a straight question: will he condemn unreservedly the outrageous attempt by Labour spin doctors to intimidate the BBC and insult a respected journalist, John Humphrys? Is it not time that, rather than shooting the messenger, the Government changed the message?

Mr. Bradley: I am sure that the BBC can well look after itself and does not need the help of the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Speaking as someone to whom the welfare state gave a great deal of opportunity, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he considers £77 a week adequate for a lone parent of, say, a baby or toddler who needs her at home, to keep herself and her child fed, clothed and warm, when there is a wealth of evidence that the current rate of income support—£82—is inadequate for basic needs? In view of the Government's determination to press ahead with those cuts, what confidence can we have in the Prime Minister's statement this weekend that the Government will look after those in need?

Mr. Bradley: Obviously, there is always concern about the level of income through benefits. That is exactly why the national child care strategy and the new deal for lone parents will help people to get back into work and be significantly better off. The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that we shall not take away benefits from those who need it. I am happy to give that reassurance today.

Mr. Leigh: When did the Minister change his mind?

Mr. Bradley: I have not changed my mind.

Mr. Swinney: Does the Minister not understand the frustration and anger that is felt by many people on benefits whose circumstances do not change but whose benefits decline? What confidence can he give the general public that, under the comprehensive spending review, we are not simply seeing another means of changing the goalposts to deny legitimate benefits to people who deserve them?

Mr. Bradley: The purpose is to ensure that everyone has opportunities. The welfare state has been failing people; we want to help them, and the changes that we make will ensure that people enjoy the opportunities that we on the Government Benches are determined to let them have.

Ms Hewitt: Does my hon. Friend agree that, wherever possible, children in a lone-parent family should also receive financial and practical support from the non-resident parent? Will he confirm that the Government's new deal will help many non-resident fathers into employment? Will he assure the House that the review of the Child Support Act 1991 now taking place will consider the possible introduction of a maintenance disregard for lone parents now receiving income support?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend raises two very important points. The new deal for the young unemployed and the long-term unemployed should help them get back into work and enable them to make a proper contribution to their families. Secondly, in the comprehensive review

of the Child Support Agency that is under way, we shall certainly consider the matter that my hon. Friend has brought to our attention this afternoon.

Mr. Streeter: How will the new deal proposals help any lone parent who wishes to stay at home and raise her pre-school children herself?

Mr. Bradley: A lone parent will have the choice—she can participate in the new deal or remain at home to look after her children.

Women's Issues

8. **Caroline Flint:** What plans she has for considering women's issues during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Union. [19064]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Ms Joan Ruddock): The theme of the United Kingdom presidency of the European Union is employability. The employability of women will be central to that theme. We, the Ministers for women, know that women want to work, but a major barrier to their aspirations is the lack of affordable child care. That is why the Government are developing the national child care strategy and have accepted, for the first time, that child care is an economic issue.

Caroline Flint: Is the Minister aware that the record of child care in Britain is not the envy of the rest of our partners in Europe? May I give her some figures? I should emphasise that it is the track record of the previous Government that has led us to this dismal time today. Some 95 per cent. of French pre-school children aged three and over—compared to only one third of British children—have access to publicly funded child care, as do 95 per cent. of Belgian children and some 70 per cent. of German and Spanish children. Will my hon. Friend ensure that, during our presidency of the European Union, we learn from our European partners so that women in Britain can benefit from the opportunity to go to work and their family life can be strengthened by access to quality child care?

Ms Ruddock: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I can tell her that the Government have already announced a £300 million investment in child care provision over the next five years, that a conference will take place in January bringing together key players to discuss the strategy and that that strategy will be published during the first part of 1998.

Moreover, I am delighted to be able to tell my hon. Friend that, because we shall have made such progress, we shall indeed be sharing best practice with our colleagues in Europe. In the first week of May, a meeting of Ministers for women from European Union member states will take place in Belfast. The topic will be women and employability, and the importance of child care.

Mrs. Gillan: May I—unlike the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)—warmly welcome the Minister on the occasion of her first appearance at the Dispatch Box? Conservative Members are particularly pleased that she has finally come out of the closet. I hope that she will make it a double first by answering my question directly, rather than avoiding questions like her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I am sure that, when all European eyes are focused on the United Kingdom during its presidency of the European Union, the Minister will, like me, be concerned about the status of women in this country. Will she tell me, therefore, whether she supports the proposals now sitting in the Treasury to abolish independent taxation for women—yes or no?

Ms Ruddock: I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome. It may interest hon. Members that she held a portfolio of this nature in the last Government, but she was entirely invisible: there were no effects of policies for women from that Government. I must tell her that, for the first time, we now have a Government who are committed to putting women's interests at the heart of policy making. As for her direct question, I give her this direct answer: there are no such proposals sitting in the Treasury.

Departmental Spending Plans

11. **Mr. Lansley:** What estimate she has made of the increase in her Department's spending plans due to the rise in inflation. [19067]

Mr. Field: The answer is £600 million.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Given that increase in spending plans, which is due to inflation, will he go on to tell us by what means the Government propose to reduce expenditure in other areas in order to bring their spending plans back into line with those proposed by the last Conservative Government, to which they are themselves committed? Will he also tell us whether he has any plans to means-test or tax disability living allowance?

Mr. Field: The adjustments will be met in the normal way.

Mr. Corbyn: Are the Government planning a "less than inflation" increase in spending on all disability benefits in the coming years? Will the Minister take this opportunity to tell us exactly what examination is being undertaken of disability benefits, what plans he has to announce the terms of the inquiry that is taking place and how we can influence that inquiry to try to protect the existing disability benefit system?

Mr. Field: The Government will consult on their proposals. We have two major objectives. The Labour party has always believed in protecting the poor and the vulnerable, and that belief remains. We are also well aware that many people on benefit would like to work and are able to do so, and we are seeking ways in which to extend opportunities to them. Because it takes time to formulate such plans, we have been working hard on them. As I have said, when we have concrete proposals, we shall present them to the House and consult on them.

Mr. Webb: Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance that he will not use inflationary pressures on the departmental budget as an excuse for

cutting other areas of spending, such as disability benefits? I note that the Prime Minister has promised that no one in need will have their benefits cut. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that anyone currently in receipt of disability benefit is not in need?

Mr. Field: We have made it clear that the Labour party's historic commitment is to protecting the poor and the vulnerable and to advancing their interests. If the hon. Gentleman believes that all the people in his constituency who draw a range of benefits are entitled to those benefits, he does not have the constituents I have.

Mr. Skinner: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, on a previous occasion, I asked him where the work is? The welfare-to-work proposal, abstract though it is, could enable some people to find work in areas of extremely low unemployment, but unemployment in some parts of Bolsover is more than 30 per cent. as a result of 18 years of a Tory Government shutting all the pits and associated industries. Will there be any variation on this theme, because in my part of the world there is not the work that my right hon. Friend keeps talking about? Has he had a word with other Departments about whether that work will be provided?

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend's constituency is similar to mine as far as unemployment rates go. The Government's aim is to move money from benefits to work opportunities. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has raised £3.5 billion additional taxation from the privatised utilities, which is being used to create opportunities. That will increase opportunities in Birkenhead and Bolsover. It is not merely a question of drawing up a list of available jobs. Under the welfare-to-work proposal, people will have four options. The £3.5 billion will underwrite the cost of those options. That programme will extend opportunities in all constituencies.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Given the Minister of State's answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), is he aware of the proposals now going through the House to restrict the payment of council tax benefit? Given what the Prime Minister said over the weekend about people who suffer with disabilities, will the Minister consider exempting them from that cut?

Mr. Field: The proposals were fully debated in the House last week and our position remains the same.

Pensioners

12. **Ms Ward:** What is the Government's policy on welfare reform for pensioners. [19068]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): A key objective of the pensions review is to ensure that pensioners have an adequate income in retirement, that they share fairly in rising national prosperity and that public finances are both sustainable and affordable. As we were not prepared to wait for the outcome of the review, which will publish its proposals in the first half of next year, the Chancellor, in his pre-Budget statement, announced our scheme to spend £200 million this year and again next year on winter fuel payments. That is £50 for every pensioner household on income support and £20 for all other pensioner households.

Ms Ward: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he recognise that some pensioners in my constituency will not, unfortunately, be around when the review is published? Some pensioners are in deep poverty. Will my hon. Friend assure them that the review will not only look to the future and to tomorrow's pensioners, but will seek to give positive responses and immediate assistance to today's pensioners?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right. Today's pensioners are looking for action from the Government and I am pleased to say that they have already seen it. We have kept our election promise to cut VAT on fuel and, as I said, we have announced an additional £200 million this winter and again next winter to help my hon. Friend's constituents and many other pensioners throughout the country to meet their winter fuel bills this year and next.

Mr. Gale: Does the Minister understand that many pensioners' incomes depend on disability benefits? Does he further understand that many of my constituents do not trust the Secretary of State's assurances any more than they trust those of a Prime Minister who seems more interested in looking after and saving the skin of the Paymaster General than in the interests of the disabled? Can the Minister come to the Dispatch Box—is he allowed to—and say categorically that there are no plans to cut disability living allowance or to make it harder for my constituents to obtain it?

Mr. Denham: Pensioners, including those with disabilities, want to be able to live with independence and dignity. That is why it is important for us to ensure that pensioners receive the right mix of cash and services that enable them to live with the independence and dignity that they deserve.

Child Support Agency

15. **Mr. Blizzard:** What progress has been made to improve the operation of the Child Support Agency. [19071]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are determined to ensure that the Child Support Agency provides an effective and efficient service for all its customers. There are some signs that the agency's performance has improved since its early days. For example, more child support maintenance is now collected and passed on to lone mothers each month by the agency than was in the whole of its first year. However, we are certainly not complacent and we realise that there is still a very long way to go before the agency's customers receive an adequate level of service. We are therefore looking closely at all aspects of the agency's work to ensure that it provides a consistent, fair and efficient service to all its clients. We aim to bring forward proposals in the first half of next year.

Mr. Blizzard: I fully realise the scale of the problem with the CSA: it is one that we inherited from the previous Government and it is why I have noticed no reduction in the number of constituents who come to my surgeries

seeking my help to resolve problems. One of the worst problems relates to the difficulty of communicating with Belfast, especially by telephone. Will the Minister look into the recent announcement by the CSA about the withdrawal of local field officers from my constituency and, I think, from others? My office has found them useful in efforts to resolve problems. At the end of the review, will my hon. Friend ensure that the system gets for the resident parent the child support to which that parent is entitled and that the non-resident parent faces a bill, if I may call it that, that he—it is usually a man—can afford to pay? In my surgery it is not only women constituents who cry about the lack of support; men cry about the bill from the CSA and say that they cannot pay it.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I held an advice surgery this weekend and I fully appreciate the number of Child Support Agency cases that are still being brought to the attention of hon. Members. We must improve the situation and ensure that both parents—the one who is looking after the children and the one who is not—understand what the amount of money should be. There must be a proper communications system between Child Support Agency centres, whether they are in Belfast or anywhere else, so that people have an efficient and reliable service that they fully understand. I shall certainly consider as part of the review process the points that my hon. Friend has raised. I hope that, when our proposals are presented next year, those items will be properly addressed in the review.

Sir David Madel: Does the answer to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) mean that the Government really will make it easier for people to have local interviews when they run into problems with the Child Support Agency—rather than the reverse, as the hon. Member for Waveney suggested? My constituents cannot get through to Dudley, Plymouth, Hastings or Belfast.

Madam Speaker: Hear, hear.

Sir David Madel: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Could the Government increase the number of people who can give a local interview—as one can see one's income tax man, VAT man or rent officer locally? I need go no further.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments and for your support, Madam Speaker. It is essential that our active modern service proposals produce a social security system—of which child support is a crucial part—that allows the best communication at the most appropriate time, whether through face-to-face interviews, better communication by telephone or through the use of other technology. We must examine all these means of communication and the way in which the agency operates—including its working hours and weekend working—so that people can communicate in the way that best suits them and their families.

Mr. Wicks: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the most extraordinary features of last week's controversy about lone parents was that all the talk was about mothers? It was as though children have only one parent and that it is up to mothers to look after their children, however young, and to find the wage for the family income. Does my hon. Friend agree that although there have been major problems concerning the CSA, the great scandal is that only 20 per cent. of mothers on income support currently receive any child maintenance from the CSA and that the Government must foster policies on access and maintenance so that those children—some of the poorest in Britain—are cared for and funded by both their mothers and their fathers?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned clearly in her speech to the House last week. We must ensure that maintenance is paid reliably, so that the parent with care knows that that income will be available. As part of the drive for efficiency and fairness in the CSA, that is one of the items at the top of the agenda.

Miss McIntosh: Does the Minister accept that it is wrong for the Government to withhold the funds that have been overpaid by parents simply because those parents can be traced, as the Minister remarked at the previous Question Time on this subject? The fact that a parent can be traced does not give the CSA the right to withhold money. Where a genuine overpayment has been made, the money must be returned at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comment. Efficiency in the agency must mean not only that the right money is paid over, but that if any overpayments have been made, the money is returned appropriately. We will look into the matter again and I shall write to the hon. Lady with further details.

Departmental Resources (Allocation Priorities)

16. **Ms Kelly:** What factors underlay her decision to give priority to (i) child care, (ii) violence against women and (iii) family-friendly working in allocating departmental resources. [19072]

Ms Harman: The Government are giving priority to the concerns which, for years, women have been raising, but which the previous Government ignored: child care and family-friendly employment to help women balance their home and work responsibilities and protection from violence at home and in the outside world.

Ms Kelly: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. On Friday I will be able to see for myself the benefits of after-school clubs when I visit the Horwich parish playcentre in my constituency. However, I understand that there are waiting lists for that club, as for many similar clubs in Bolton. Will my right hon. Friend tell me how she plans to tackle this problem?

Ms Harman: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his green Budget that there would be a £300 million investment in after-school clubs, which will enable the current 3,000 after-school projects to be expanded to 30,000. Opposition Members said that there was no need for extra child care and that that investment was not needed, but the waiting lists in my hon. Friend's constituency and throughout the country are testament to

the fact that there has been a demand from parents throughout the country which for many years was ignored and which we are now tackling.

Sir Michael Spicer: On welfare reform, family friendly or otherwise, does the thinking of the Minister for Welfare Reform dominate the Government's thinking, or not?

Ms Harman: We have set out the principles that underlie our approach to welfare reform. We want to modernise the welfare state because it is failing too many of the people it is supposed to help; it does not ensure that there are opportunities for people who have been written off to a life on benefit and it does not ensure that those who cannot work are able to lead independent and dignified lives in the community through the right package of care and support.

Our determination to ensure that we extend opportunities to people is evidenced by our £195 million investment to help people with disabilities who, under the previous Government, were written off to a life on benefit.

Mr. Hope: Is my right hon. Friend aware of research by the Department for Education and Employment that shows that women who get a qualification can earn up to 20 per cent. more per hour than those who do not? Indeed, those with a vocational qualification can earn up to 50 per cent. per hour more. Are not qualifications and training vital to the success of women who go back to work?

Will my right hon. Friend take some future opportunity to visit the Pen Green centre in my constituency, which has been declared a centre of excellence? It provides child care, training and support for parents to help them get back to work, have their children looked after and get out of poverty.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend makes a number of important points. It is important that women have the right opportunities to train to improve their qualifications so that they can not only get a job, but get on in their work. I have been discussing with my ministerial colleagues in the Department the opportunities available for women to gain qualifications through part-time and term-time courses; central to the extension of such opportunities is child care. I will be happy to visit the Pen Green centre in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am confident that, through the opportunity provided by the extra £300 million investment in child care, we can spread the good practice that he has described to many other parts of the country where, at the moment, there are only waiting lists and unmet demand.

Dr. Julian Lewis: As the question refers to violence against women, will the right hon. Lady join me in condemning the conduct of Labour Front and Back Benchers last Friday? They spent no less than five hours talking out a Bill that was supported by every leading mental health charity and which would have prevented rape of female in-patients in psychiatric units. Does she support or condemn those tactics?

Ms Harman: The position is as it was set out. We have to look at the whole issue. We are determined to tackle the issue of violence against women, both domestic violence and violence in the wider world. On the basis of consultation with women throughout the country, we will present proposals that will show that we intend to tackle the issue with the seriousness that it deserves.

Pension Increases

18. **Mr. Mitchell:** What is her estimate of the extra cost of tying the pension increase for the coming year to earnings rather than prices. [19074]

Mr. Denham: The estimated additional net cost of paying contributory retirement pension and all linked benefits uprated by the average earnings index rather than the retail prices index is £150 million for the financial year 1998–99.

Mr. Mitchell: As the cost is comparatively small and as the Government's finances are in a much better state than had been thought—the deficit will probably be about £3 billion lower, so there is money available—why do we not compensate pensioners for the 18 years during which Tory Governments did not tie increases to average earnings, but only to the retail prices index? Why do we not give pensioners a Christmas bonanza and say that we will tie increases to average earnings in future?

Mr. Denham: The future uprating of the basic state pension is being considered by the pensions review. I have had a series of invaluable meetings with the National Pensioners Convention in an effort to understand the views of many of today's pensioners. I cited a cost of £150 million, but we have also announced £200 million for pensioners this winter. We have not only met our manifesto commitment to uprate the basic state pension at least in line with prices; we have made another £200 million available. We have met our manifesto commitment to enable pensioners to share fairly in our national prosperity and we have given priority to the poorest pensioners—another manifesto commitment.

Mr. Forth: What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of the council tax increase on pensioners' standards of living? What explanation does he have for the inordinate number of Government Whips on the Treasury Bench today? Could it be connected in any way with the Government's desire to keep at bay their own critics?

Mr. Denham: The pensions review is examining all issues of concern to and insecurity for today's pensioners. We are actively discussing those issues with the National Pensioners Convention and with many other pensioners' organisations.

Child Support Agency

20. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** How many cases involving the Child Support Agency have been referred to the independent case examiner; and if she will make a statement. [19076]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The office of the independent case examiner started work on 7 April 1997. By 30 November, 634 complaints about the Child Support Agency had been received. Of those, 378 have been accepted for investigation, of which 97 have been resolved.

We acknowledge the important contribution that the independent case examiner can make to improving service standards for the agency's clients and we are determined to ensure that any shortcomings that she identifies will be addressed effectively.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, which indicates that the Child Support Agency was established by the previous Tory Government in a totally inappropriate manner and that the agency lacks a proper and fair appeals system to help people understand its work. Will he assure me that the independent case examiner's work will be given sufficient backing so that there is a quick response to pending appeals and that there will not be a replication of the previous situation, in which the ombudsman was so overwhelmed by referrals from the CSA that an independent examiner had to be appointed? Will the independent case examiner receive sufficient support to ensure that cases are dealt with quickly?

Mr. Bradley: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. Under proposals in the Social Security Bill, the appeals system has been streamlined to ensure that service on appeals is more efficient and effective. We also think that the independent case examiner is crucial in ensuring much better service, in identifying cases much more quickly and in resolving those cases as speedily as possible. That action is essential to restore confidence in the Child Support Agency, which I know every hon. Member will welcome.

Mr. Flight: Will the Minister assure the House that the CSA will give priority to the hard cases of parents who make no contribution towards their children and not to the soft cases in which all the data are easily available and which often seem to result in considerable injustice?

Mr. Bradley: It is essential that there is fairness and efficiency across the board at the Child Support Agency and that all parents who have a responsibility to their child through proper payment of child maintenance fulfil that responsibility. That is the Government's commitment. We want a fair and efficient service to ensure that our commitment is met as quickly as possible.

Mr. Drew: Does my hon. Friend agree that the basic problem with the Child Support Agency is that the formula is hideously complicated and that many questions on appeal are a consequence of the lack of clarity with which the agency uses that formula?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I said, I held an advice bureau this weekend at which someone produced their correspondence on the formula. Although it is alleged that I am meant to understand those matters, I found the correspondence incomprehensible. That incomprehensibility is why the formula is being considered in the child support review. Next year, we hope to introduce proposals to ensure not only that there is a proper and efficient formula that everyone will understand but that people who are responsible for making payments through the Child Support Agency do so—for the benefit of the parent who is caring for the child and, crucially, for the children.

Benefits Take-up

21. **Mr. Rendel:** When her departmental spending projections will be amended to take account of the Government's measures to increase take-up of benefits. [19077]

Mr. Field: The Government are undertaking research into why up to 1 million pensioners do not claim the income support to which they appear to be entitled. We will follow that by initiating a series of pilot schemes on how best to deliver help to those who are eligible but do not claim. Only then will be in a position to amend our expenditure totals.

Mr. Rendel: If we assume for the moment that these plans are successful, as we must hope they are, and that take-up increases, will the Minister assure us that the Chancellor has told him that he will pay for increased take-up by an increase in the social security budget, or will it have to be paid for by a decrease in benefit levels?

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman has a one-dimensional view of the make-up of the expenditure budget. A future budget can be affected by levels of employment and demographic changes; it may also be affected by the effectiveness of the pilot schemes that we hope to initiate shortly. Only then can we make a decision in the round on what will happen to our expenditure totals.

European Council

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the European Council in Luxembourg on 12 and 13 December, which I attended with my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd). I have placed a copy of the conclusions in the Library.

The main business of this European Council was the historic decision to launch the enlargement process for Cyprus and the countries of central and eastern Europe. We also discussed monetary union, and I will deal with that first.

The question before the Luxembourg Council was how to give effect to the remit from Amsterdam

"to improve the processes of economic co-ordination in Stage 3 of economic and monetary union consistent with the principles and practices of the Treaty".

Most of this was straightforward, but there was a proposal for the establishment of a body of members of the single currency area only—the so-called Euro X group—to discuss not only specific questions about the management of the euro, but a wide range of economic issues of common concern to all 15 member states, including tax reform and the labour market.

Our concern was to avoid a role for this body which would undermine the role of the ECOFIN Council and cut across the treaty provision that economic policies are a matter of common concern to all member states. This would have created quite unnecessary divisions in the European Union.

The outcome at Luxembourg has confirmed that the ECOFIN Council is the sole decision-making body on economic co-ordination, and that the remit of the informal body of euro participants will be limited. Whenever matters of common interest to all member states are to be discussed, all 15 are entitled to be there, wherever the discussions take place. What is more, in the event of any dispute over what is of common interest, the issue can be tabled at ECOFIN, which is the only place where decisions can be taken. This is a reasonable and sensible agreement.

The European Council also agreed to intensify further efforts to complete the internal market; to give priority to the computer problems arising from the millennium date change, the so-called millennium bug; and to ensure that environmental protection requirements are integrated into the Community's policies and activities. We also issued statements on the middle east peace process, food safety, and the 50th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights.

On enlargement, we took a series of important decisions. First, we agreed to establish a European conference for the 15 European Union member states and those European countries aspiring to join. It will cover co-operation on foreign and security policy, justice and home affairs, and other matters of common concern, particularly economic issues and regional co-operation. Countries respecting certain fundamental principles and values will be invited to take part. Such offers will be made to the 10 central and eastern European applicant countries, to Cyprus and to Turkey. The first meeting will take place under the UK presidency in London in March, at Head of Government level.

Secondly, an inclusive enlargement process for all 10 central and east European applicant countries and Cyprus will be launched by a meeting at Foreign Minister level on 30 March. The process will involve accession partnerships with each of the 11 countries and pre-accession aid, which will be increased substantially.

Thirdly, on the basis of the Commission's recommendations on readiness for membership, formal accession negotiations will open in spring with Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus. Each negotiation will be conducted separately, at its own pace. The accession negotiations for Cyprus should contribute to a political settlement of the intercommunal problem. The Council made it clear that representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community should be part of the Cypriot delegation.

Preparations for the opening of accession negotiations for the other five central and east European countries—Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia—will be speeded up. The readiness of all 11 applicants will be reviewed regularly. There is no predetermined order of accession. Individual countries can catch up or be caught up.

Fourthly, the Council agreed on the importance of a special strategy to prepare Turkey for future accession once the necessary political and economic conditions have been satisfied, according to the same criteria used for other candidates. Turkey recognises that time and changes are needed before actual accession negotiations can be envisaged, but full recognition of its eligibility for accession is a marked step forward for Turkey, and I welcome it.

I wrote immediately to Prime Minister Yilmaz to encourage him to take full advantage of that opportunity. I understand Turkish disappointment at being treated in an apparently different way from others, but I continue to hope the Turks will come to see the advantages of participation in the European conference as a further step towards eventual membership.

The House will recognise the significance of the decisions. A giant step has been taken towards the elimination of the divisions in Europe left by the cold war. Although the negotiations will inevitably take some years, we have an historic opportunity to secure freedom and prosperity across our continent. That has been a long-standing British objective. I am delighted that the process will be launched during the British presidency. We shall ensure that it gets off to a flying start. I know that the whole House will welcome that.

Reform of European Union policies will, of course, also be essential if enlargement is to be successful. In July the Commission circulated its proposals for such reform and for the future financial framework. The proposals envisage further desperately needed reform of the common agricultural policy, reform of the structural and cohesion funds and maintenance of the current 1.27 per cent. ceiling on own resources. The European Council agreed that those ideas represented a good working basis and called for formal legislative proposals from the Commission as soon as possible. We shall push that vital work as far as we can during our presidency, although the timetable for final decisions is necessarily longer than that.

The European Council meeting was important. We agreed to launch enlargement negotiations and set a strong framework for all the potential candidates, including Turkey. We gave real impetus to the process of CAP reform. We ensured that the position of the UK in economic policy co-ordination is fully safeguarded. That is an excellent launch pad for our presidency in the first half of next year. Our priorities will be those that can help transform ordinary people's lives—above all, employment and jobs.

The Luxembourg summit showed again that the Government are positively engaged in Europe as a leading and influential player and resolute in the defence of our interests and what is right. I commend the outcome of the summit to the House as good for Britain, good for the European Union and good for the wider interests of Europe too.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement, and I welcome a number of the conclusions of the Council, especially the support that the Council gave to the middle east peace process; and the commitment to completing the single market, which is long overdue. I also welcome the historic decision to press ahead with the enlargement of the Union, to include certain countries of central and eastern Europe, and Cyprus. The Government will have the full support of the Opposition in achieving that goal which, as the right hon. Gentleman says, is a long-standing British objective.

I also welcome what the Prime Minister has said about accession partnerships with each of the 11 countries, as it is important that the countries not included in the first wave of accession should not feel that their applications are on the back burner.

The Prime Minister has said that reform of the common agricultural policy is desperately needed, and he is right. But will he ensure that proposals for CAP reform do not hit the British farmer disproportionately, since the farming community is now facing intense and mounting difficulties, partly as a result of the actions of the Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] When the Government cut the bovine spongiform encephalopathy support price and take away hill livestock payments, it is indeed partly as a result of the actions of the Government..

Did the other Heads of Government tell the right hon. Gentleman during the summit that their representatives on the EU Veterinary Committee would vote today to postpone the food safety measures which he believes are essential? We shall support the Government's restrictions on imports; but how confident is the Prime Minister that the United Kingdom will not now face legal action from the Commission for adopting this measure?

Does the Prime Minister agree that European Union costs will escalate as a result of enlargement; and can he outline what plans he has to deal with those costs? Will he guarantee that the budget rebate won by a Conservative Government, and worth about £18 billion since it was introduced, will not be forfeited? Will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that the reference in the presidency conclusions to "discouraging harmful tax competition" will not herald measures to erode the advantage that this country enjoys from our low tax rates?

When the right hon. Gentleman discusses tax reform, will he involve the Paymaster General who, after all, has wide experience of different tax regimes throughout the EU? Or better still, will he not do so, so as to improve the credibility of the Government?

Turning from what was happily agreed at the Council to what was not happily agreed, does the right hon. Gentleman recall that, in the days leading up to Luxembourg, all his talk was of not backing down on the issue of British membership of the Euro X committee? Does he remember the Government saying that Britain should take part in single currency decisions and be a member of the committee as a matter of right? Does he believe that it was wise to advertise in advance that he would not give way on the issue, and then, when he arrived at the summit, to give way on it? Would he accept that the cack-handled way the Government have handled these negotiations has damaged their credibility in Europe and caused considerable resentment and anger, on the part not just of the French Government but of the German Government and other states?

Will the right hon. Gentleman learn his lesson from this summit and, in future, if he is going to make demands, will he stick to them? If he is not going to stick to them, will he not make them in the first place?

Will the Prime Minister give a straightforward answer to the question: is Britain in or out of the key single currency meetings which the Government were adamant they would be in? What is the precise nature of the so-called informal meetings among the single currency member states? Can a meeting that includes 11 European Governments, the European Commission and the European central bank properly be described as informal?

The 11 Governments promised to consult Britain on matters of common interest. Who will decide what those matters of common interest might be—Britain or the 11 states? Can the Prime Minister give us examples of what might be considered matters of common interest—and what might not be?

The Prime Minister will be aware that the behaviour of the Government's spin doctors, which came in for much criticism from other Governments at the Commonwealth conference, has again been the cause of much complaint. Has he seen the report in *The Times* today which states:

> "At Luxembourg and other Euro-gatherings since the Government took power, the Prime Minister's team have alienated foreign journalists with a spin-doctor style that varies between aggressive and contemptuous"?

Will the right hon. Gentleman help our foreign relations by keeping these people away from future international gatherings, as we all want Britain's presidency of the EU to be a success?

We want genuine progress to be made on enlargement, the completion of the single market, CAP reform and job creation, but will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that, at next year's important Councils, he and other Ministers will concentrate less on image and more on substance?

The Prime Minister: I could not work out which direction the right hon. Gentleman was coming from on that one; however, I shall deal with his points in the order in which he raised them.

We are agreed on enlargement and the accession partnerships. As for reform of the common agricultural policy, I have no doubt at all that it is massively in Britain's interests and in the interests of our farming community. The worst thing that has happened to our farmers is the BSE fiasco visited upon them by the previous Government. Not merely did the previous

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Government refuse to take any responsibility for it, but, in relation to the livestock allowances and the payments to farmers, we have been carrying on precisely the regime that we inherited. Indeed, we have been trying to do better for the farmers than the previous Government did.

In relation to the specified risk materials, we have made it absolutely clear that, as there has been some delay in introducing the measure in the European Union, we shall introduce it ourselves. That was made clear some months ago, when my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture insisted upon it. Particularly after what happened recently in respect of the United States and European beef, it is important for the rest of Europe to realise that BSE is not simply a British problem. It is now in the interests of all Europe to get it sorted out.

We have before the European Commission both the export certified herds scheme and the date-based scheme. We are making progress on both, and I hope that we can report more substantial progress in the not too distant future. It is extremely important that there is some movement on that. Otherwise, the ludicrous predicament will continue whereby people eat British beef here, but we are not allowed to export it.

As I have said before to the right hon. Gentleman, some of the tax competition measures are helpful to British companies. In respect of the cost of enlargement, we are keen to maintain the own resources ceiling precisely because we want to ensure proper budgetary discipline. At Britain's behest, some strong words were included in the Council's conclusion on that.

As for Euro X, I could not work out whether the right hon. Gentleman was saying that we should have simply conceded the point, or whether we should have fought even harder. The idea that countries inside the euro should discuss certain issues and that other issues should be set apart from that is set out in the Maastricht treaty that was negotiated by the previous Government, so it is absurd for the right hon. Gentleman to criticise us for accepting that distinction when it is in the treaty that was negotiated by the previous Conservative Government.

What was vitally important about the discussion on Euro X is that that informal body is no longer in danger of becoming an economic government body for Europe, taking decisions on matters such as tax reform and the labour market, and Britain being excluded from it. That will not happen now, as is absolutely clear from the Council's conclusions. As for damaging relations with France and Germany, I do not believe that they have been damaged at all.

The Government will stand up for British interests whatever the circumstances. That position has always been urged upon us by the Conservatives. Then, when we stand up for British interests, they tell us that we should have given way in the interests of being better members of the Community. It is absurd.

The right hon. Gentleman asked who would decide which were matters of common interest. Again, thanks to the position that we have adopted, that will now be decided by ECOFIN—the Finance Ministers of all 15 countries. It is absolutely clear that, from now on, the Euro X informal grouping will be able to discuss matters of specific sole interest to those inside the euro, but anything of common interest to all has to be discussed by all 15. That is the position won by the Government. Apparently it would not even have been fought for had the Conservatives still been in power.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Mr. George Parker, writing in the *Financial Times* today, said that we have been used over the past 18 years to communiqués and press reports on summits in Europe falling into one of two categories—triumphant isolation or humiliating defeat. I congratulate the Prime Minister on having at least broken that pattern. It seems that we have achieved one or two useful things.

First, I join the Leader of the Opposition in welcoming the move towards what the Prime Minister described as the "historic launching"—not continuation—of the move towards enlargement. That is very welcome, especially since it will be done on an inclusive basis.

Secondly, I welcome the commitment made at the summit to substantial reform of the common agricultural policy. It is right to say that that is in the interests of Europe and its consumers in particularly, although I agree with the leader of the Conservative party that "You ain't seen nothing yet" when it comes to the lobbying that we are likely to get from farmers when the process starts. It is very easy to give—indeed, our recent history is littered with—commitments to reform the CAP. It will be judged in the end by actions not words.

Since it seems that we are using this statement as a peg on which to hang comments on BSE, I recommend to the Prime Minister four actions, which I hope he will consider. First, I recommend that he reconsiders the ban on bone-in beef. I know of the legal advice that he has received, but it would be quite adequate to advise the public of the risk and let them make their own judgment.

Secondly, I recommend that we exercise as rigorous control on beef coming into this country as we do on British beef consumed in this country. Thirdly, I recommend that the Prime Minister reconsiders compensation. I know that that requires some Government commitment, but the state of farming is such at present that that is necessary. Finally, let the Government use their influence on supermarkets in particular, so that country of origin is labelled on beef.

As for the rest, the Euro X, as the Prime Minister has said, is the key element of the decision. I am bound to say that the Prime Minister has made the best of a very weak hand, although the fact that his hand is weak is of his own choosing. He dealt the hand to himself; his own Government did so.

We have consistently said that, although we welcome the apparent decision in principle that a European single currency is a good idea and Britain should be part of it if the British people agree in a referendum, the Government have not yet made a clear declaration of policy on their intention to join, with a target date and policies consistent with it. We have consistently said that, unless and until the Government do that, their own bargaining hand and influence in Europe will be weaker, and the consequences will be felt in investment and jobs in due course.

If the Prime Minister is to respond by saying that this is just a typical example of the Liberal Democrats' overblown enthusiasm for Europe, I would remind him—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, it is."] I remind the Prime Minister and Conservative Members that such a view is now the

overwhelming view of the CBI, the TUC, many Labour Members and very many sensible and senior Conservatives.

Until and unless the Government do what they say they should be doing—setting a lead on Europe—the consequence for Britain in lost influence, investment and, ultimately, jobs will be greater than the Prime Minister wants it to be. I repeat what I have said before: I believe that the Government will be driven down the course by events rather than leading them, which is what they should be doing.

The Prime Minister: I was going to start not by criticising the right hon. Gentleman but by thanking him for his support, on certain issues at least.

On Euro X and the battle over it, it is important that we get beyond the idea that, whenever there is a dispute in Europe, there is a choice between isolation and surrender. That is absurd. All countries fight for their interests in the EU.

The day after the dispute on Euro X—in which, I may say, many countries were on Britain's side, because they were concerned about the nature of the body—we had lengthy disputes on other issues, such as own resources, issues in relation to Turkey and other matters, in which Britain was on the same side as, for example, France. It is part of maturity of opposition in Europe that we should accept that there will be certain times when we fight on certain issues, as all countries do to defend their interests.

It was very important that Euro X was kept strictly to areas set out in the Maastricht treaty. Despite what was said earlier, if we had allowed the proposal to go forward on its original basis, it could effectively have become ECOFIN mark 2. We did not want that, and it is absolutely plain that that is not what it will be.

In respect of enlargement and reform of the CAP, such reform will be a big battle; we will have to do battle again. In my view, there will be a pro-European battle for reform of the CAP. It is absurd that the consumer in Europe ends up with vast sums of money spent on the common agricultural policy—over half the money spent in the European Union is spent in that way. Reform is right, for Britain and for British farmers. On BSE, I will carefully consider the points that the right hon. Gentleman has made, and he will have heard what I said about the specified risk materials.

On monetary union as a whole, it would be a mistake if we were to set some arbitrary date. It is important to get it right and to have the principles clearly set out. Those principles are clear—the date will be determined by a hard-headed look at our national economic interests. That is the best and most sensible test, and it is well understood by other European countries.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The House will welcome the statement by my right hon. Friend about the successful outcome to the debate about the membership of the Euro X club in relation to ECOFIN. Given that the lines of communication are now clear, can we look forward to a successful launch of the euro on 1 May next year?

The Prime Minister: The discussions and decisions on the launch of the euro will take place during our presidency, and it is important that the launch is handled constructively and well. It is in Britain's interests, in or out, for the euro to succeed, and it will be an important part of our presidency next year. However, it is also important to make it clear throughout that general matters of economic co-ordination are matters for all 15 European countries.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not the case that the members of Euro X will talk about whatever they choose to talk about, and the Prime Minister and the Government have no gagging order or power to direct or curb those discussions? Inasmuch as the members will talk about monetary union, they will be within the terms and provisions of the treaty of the European Union signed in Maastricht, which sought to achieve, in effect, a single state by virtue of economic and monetary union. Can the right hon. Gentleman please spare the House and the country further such exercises in futility?

The Prime Minister: I find it extraordinary that people who are supposed to be so-called Euro-sceptics should say that that battle was not worth fighting. It would be easier to say that if one wanted Britain to join monetary union immediately, since we would then be part of the informal Euro X. It is absurd if Conservative Members' position is that they do not want monetary union at any price, because it is vital that any body that discusses the issues is properly defined and that main economic decision making is kept to all 15.

The hon. Gentleman says that we have no means of limiting the Euro X—he is wrong. The very purpose of having the battle was to make it clear and have it reaffirmed that ECOFIN—including all 15—is the only decision-making body. In the event of any dispute over what is in the common interests of all, we have the ability to table the issue and have it decided by all 15. If the Conservative party thinks that that is not a battle worth fighting, it has no strategic sense at all.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does the Prime Minister recognise that the agreement that has just been reached in Luxembourg would not have been possible without the Amsterdam treaty, and that the position adopted by the former Government would have made the Amsterdam treaty impossible? Therefore, enlargement could not be beginning now, and the welcome statements about the future enlargement of the European Union would not have been possible without the change of Government.

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend says is right. First, the Tories had a negotiating position at Amsterdam that was absurd and untenable; secondly, they would have held a referendum, and no doubt we would still have been in the middle of the campaign.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will Euro X submit its agenda to the Prime Minister before each meeting so that he can make representations on what is appropriate for it to discuss and what is appropriate for the larger Council? Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that there is genuine concern that the Government do not appear to have any effective battering rams on the matter, apart from appealing to the group of 15, where they would be outvoted? Would the right

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hon. Gentleman support any enlargement without a fundamental reform of the CAP having happened and not merely being a hope for the future?

The Prime Minister: On the first point, it is envisaged that the agenda will be circulated to all the countries so that we can see which are the matters of common interest and which are not. That is one reason why it was important to have the dispute resolved. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman what I have said to others—it is important to recognise that Britain had huge support for the position that we took, but we will get these disputes in Europe, and we should have the maturity to resolve them, reach agreement and move on.

In relation to enlargement and the common agricultural policy, I cannot see how there can be successful enlargement without reform of the CAP. It seems to me that the one is absolutely essential to make the other work.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is it or is it not true—as reported in the public prints—that, at one stage in the negotiations relating to Euro X, Chancellor Kohl said, "Look, Tony: we are trying to help you as much as we can, but I like this less and less"? If that is true, what was the context?

Do the Government recognise the concern of many in the electronics industry in particular—an industry that the Foreign Secretary and I represent—that we should be at the heart of Europe?

The Prime Minister: I cannot recall that conversation at all. Some of what I have read in terms of what Chancellor Kohl is supposed to have said during the meeting seems to be complete fantasy. Of course, people recognise that it is important to define the Euro X body properly. As for the interests of industry in monetary union, it depends on whether it is in the national economic interest as a whole. That is the test we have set; I am sure that it is the right test.

The reason we have said it is not possible for Britain to go in at the moment is that—quite apart from anything else—there is not economic convergence between our economy and others. Therefore, if we were to go in at the present time, we would find our position in the economic cycle greatly dislocated. We would have to lower interest rates at an inappropriate time, and that would have fiscal implications. There are genuine economic reasons for being extremely cautious.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Prime Minister accept the inherent contradiction in the position he has presented to the House today? On the one hand, he has signed the Amsterdam treaty—which contained arrangements for flexibility—while, on the other hand, he appears to be trying to exclude that principle when considering questions related to the Euro X committee on monetary union. Does he accept that he has led himself into a trap—and has sold the pass for the British people—in respect of the stability pact, to which he agreed in June, and the principle of monetary union, which was conceded in a statement by the Chancellor?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that at all—unless I accept the hon. Gentleman's view of what is in the British national economic interest. In my view, it would be very foolish for Britain to rule out, as a matter of principle, monetary union. That is his position, and it is a perfectly honourable one. However, I believe that that would be mistaken. *[Interruption.]* Well, it all depends on one's view of Britain's national interest. His view is that it is to rule out monetary union; my view is that it is not.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): May I press my right hon. Friend a little more on Cyprus, where, on the face of it, we have gained all we set out to achieve? How will the representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community in the joint negotiating team be selected? Will he confirm that the negotiations with Cyprus should start in March, that there will be no preconditions in relation to a political settlement before the agreement, and that, during Britain's presidency of the Union, we will do all we can to ensure that it will be full steam ahead with the Cypriot application?

The Prime Minister: There are no preconditions—that was made clear. Obviously, we want to get the accession negotiations under way as quickly as possible. In the Council conclusions, we asked the President to work in the Commission for the proper inclusion of representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community in the delegation to the accession talks. Quite how they are to be selected is not a matter upon which we should comment—certainly not at this stage. We want to do this as quickly as possible.

I still say, and I think that it is accepted by all those involved, that accession will be easier if we can get a settlement to the Cyprus problem—that is a statement of the obvious—but there are no preconditions in the accession negotiations.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does not the Prime Minister's encounter with Euro X demonstrate the inevitable costs of remaining outside European developments? Those costs are likely to get greater the longer that that persists. Would it not make sense to set out with greater clarity Britain's proposed timetable towards membership of the single currency, in terms both of political decision making and of economic convergence?

The Prime Minister: It is true that, if one is outside monetary union, one has less influence on what happens inside it, but one must also balance the costs on the other side. We have set out what are the only sensible principles. We have resolved the questions whether there is a constitutional barrier to monetary union and whether we want to be part of a successful single currency, and we have decided the economic tests of national interest that we have to assess.

We have also begun proper preparations with British industry, in case the country should want to exercise its choice to join monetary union. That is the most sensible strategy, deciding all the questions of principle without locking us into a specific, precise timetable that might end up being arbitrary and not the one that we want to engage in.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my right hon. Friend agree that enlargement also has its difficulties? Does he accept that the new agrarian economies would present even greater difficulties for reform of the common agricultural policy? As the Tories, and the Liberal

Democrats in particular, are very keen on reforming the CAP, let me enter this caveat: I would bet on it now that, when a specific proposal is made for reform of the CAP, with enlargement happening at the same time, every single one of them, including the Liberal Democrats, will oppose it. It will make welfare to work look like a tea party.

The Prime Minister: It is certainly a most welcome tea party.

My hon. Friend makes a shrewd observation: enlargement will be a lot more difficult to deliver in practice than in principle. It will be one of our main functions in our presidency to start putting in place some of the practical reforms necessary to get enlargement under way. I have a real concern that, although everyone pays lip service to the principle of enlargement, when people come face to face with the reforms that are necessary to make it work, we will find that it is a battle in which Britain will have to secure allies to carry it through.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Prime Minister referred to structural funds. As the Commission has been asked to make legislative proposals, what specific ideas will the Government propound on eligibility and the criteria for access to structural funds? What proposals does the Prime Minister have for monitoring the effective use of those funds, which have been vital to areas such as mine in the highlands and islands of Scotland? Will he confirm that structural funds will become the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament?

The Prime Minister: On the highlands and islands, we successfully argued for specific reference to sparsely populated areas. On structural funds more generally, there will undoubtedly be change, and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise, but we will of course fight hard for the fairest deal possible for Britain. It is important to recognise that, if we are to keep the ceiling on own resources and maintain tight budgetary control on structural funds, there is bound to be some form of change. We must get the best possible deal for our country, without erecting a barrier to the enlargement that we all want.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on asserting the primacy of ECOFIN and on ensuring access to the informal grouping known as Euro X, but does he agree that, the sooner we join the single currency, the sooner we will be able to enjoy the benefits of full membership?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, the sooner we join, the sooner we are members. The question is, at what point is it right to decide to join? We should set that out according to our economic interests. On Euro X, I repeat the importance of the primacy of ECOFIN and, indeed, it was clearly stated that it is the sole decision-making body. If we consider the difference between the original proposals made by our French colleagues and what has actually happened, it is important to recognise that all those things have been set in their proper context. In time, that will be of even greater importance than it appears to be now.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, as long as Britain stays outside the single currency—for the time being, at least, that policy must be right—it is inevitable that the joining countries will not agree to Britain becoming involved as a key player in those committees that manage the single currency or affect its development? Furthermore, does he agree that those committees are likely to extend their competence over other financial management matters? Should we not be realistic and accept that that is the price we have to pay for retaining control over our currency, rather than pretending that we can have our cake and eat it?

The Prime Minister: If that is an indication of the negotiating position that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have taken, then he would have yielded far too much ground. Of course, the countries inside the euro zone will discuss matters of specific responsibility, which are, after all, defined in the Maastricht treaty. We have never had any objection to that.

We have objected to informal groupings, supposedly discussing matters relating to the euro, effectively becoming an economic co-ordination body, or body of economic government, that supplants ECOFIN. It is important that we should limit that possibility, and that was what the dispute was about. The argument at the European Council was not merely about getting the right language in the Council conclusions, but about making it absolutely clear that that is what that body would be politically.

Round the table, most countries accepted that they could discuss matters that had been set out as matters of shared responsibility within Maastricht, but that issues such as tax and labour market reform and employment policy—matters that they wanted to discuss and decide in Euro X—could not be discussed informally and had to be taken to the proper body, which is ECOFIN. That will now happen in a way that it would not have happened had we not had the dispute.

Personally, I do not think that we used up much negotiating capital on that matter. One has these disputes, one sets out one's country's interests, and one fights for them. Obviously, a country that is not a member of the euro will have no influence over it—that is clear. We must prevent that informal body from effectively supplanting the formal mechanisms that we have agreed, which are vital to protect our position.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Was there any discussion of the practicalities of pressing ahead with the current timetable for monetary union—for example, the coincidence with the millennium and the consequent strain on technical resources? Did my right hon. Friend consider whether the possibility of our joining in the first wave might be in Britain's interests if a slowdown could be agreed, not least because that might help to contain some of the upward pressures on the pound, which are leading to damage to our exports and, potentially, considerable damage to our economy?

The Prime Minister: It would be a mistake if we took a decision as monumental as joining monetary union on the basis of short-term questions about interest rates or the strength of sterling, although I understand the problems that that is causing our exporters and manufacturing industry.

As regards other questions about delaying the single currency, the countries that are most concerned are very set on the timetable they have. It is important to

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understand that some countries have different economic interests from ours, such as Italy. It is very much in Italy's interests to get into the first wave of monetary union as quickly as possible. A large debt is overhanging its economy, and the interest payments on that debt are very large. If Italy could get its interest rates down by being part of monetary union, it could reduce its debt levels. There are different economic interests. The intelligent way to proceed is to recognise those different interests, and to take the decision on the basis of a hard-headed assessment of our own economic interests.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Does the Prime Minister agree that the BSE crisis is an urgent agricultural matter? Has he made any progress—either in the talks or outside them—on this matter? He is well aware, because he met a deputation in the House recently from all sides of Northern Ireland opinion on this matter, that although there is a crisis in Wales, England and Scotland, our industry in Northern Ireland is on the verge of catastrophe.

Can the right hon. Gentleman give us any encouragement that, as he promised me in the House when he stopped me on the way in to vote on Wednesday night, he will respond very soon to the delegation he met? Can he give us any timetable for that? He is very well aware that farmers are going on to the streets to take their issues to the public. As soon as we have something from him on this matter it will ease the situation, but the situation in Northern Ireland is desperate. The number of cattle in the fields is growing, and the failure of Europe to give us proper intervention means that the farmers have to feed them. They do not know what to do.

The Prime Minister: I hope that we can make progress on this as quickly as possible, because I understand the problems of the farmers in Northern Ireland—indeed, farmers here on the mainland, too—which the hon. Gentleman set out in a joint delegation to me the other day. We are doing what we can to work with their representatives to get a proper solution.

In respect of BSE, the best progress we can make is the progress that is being made at the moment. We are talking about the certified herds scheme being agreed early in the new year. That is extremely important for us. However, the EU date-based export scheme for the whole of the farming industry is even more important. We have submitted it. We are getting Commission agreement on it, and are negotiating that at the present time. It will take time—we realise that—but we are doing everything we possibly can.

I believe that other countries in Europe are beginning to understand that if they do not start to ease, in an entirely legitimate way, people's fears about BSE and beef, it will hit all European beef. There is something utterly absurd about a situation in which British people are eating British beef—Northern Ireland people are eating Northern Ireland beef—yet it is impossible for us to export it to third countries. *[Interruption.]*

Opposition Members should not give us any lessons on this, because they caused the problem. The faster we can make progress on this, the better it will be. We understand that. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture is making every effort—straining every sinew—to get this resolved as quickly as possible.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I welcome the important change announced by the Prime Minister about enlargement and the second wave of east and central European countries, including Romania. He referred to the conference to which they are to be invited next year. What other steps should be taken to ensure that those five countries know the change that has been made, and the challenge and opportunity that it gives them?

The Prime Minister: Money is being given to increase pre-accession aid in relation to the Poland and Hungary Aid for Reconstruction and the Economy programme, and, indeed, other programmes as well. It is all being kept under regular review.

Countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and so on—those that are not in the five plus one category that the European Commission set out—are part of the accession negotiations, and have the ability, through the process that we have agreed, to catch up. We met the 10 countries from central and eastern Europe, in Luxembourg on Saturday, and they are delighted that they have the framework within which they can make faster progress towards accession. That has been a very important part of the conclusions.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): When the subject of food safety was reached in the discussions, did the other European leaders not tell the Prime Minister how ridiculous he and his Government would look if they went ahead with the ban on beef on the bone as of tonight?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the advice being offered by his own Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to consumers who already have joints of beef on the bone in their freezers is that they should exercise their own judgment in deciding whether to eat those joints of beef? To use the Prime Minister's own words, is it not absurd that other consumers are not allowed to exercise the same judgment and eat beef on the bone if they want to, when the Ministry thinks that that is good enough for some consumers?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows very well, the chief medical officer gave his advice, and gave it in strong terms. If we had not followed that advice, we would have been subject to equal criticism. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman who just shouted, "Three options," should research his facts a little more carefully. It was the scientific committee that gave three options; they were referred to the chief medical officer, in accordance with normal practice, and he advised the option that we took.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend and his colleagues, both on maximising Britain's negotiating position in relation to the Euro X and ECOFIN controversy, and on providing the machinery for accession discussions to begin?

Does my right hon. Friend understand that the commencement of accession negotiations with many countries, particularly Poland, will constitute an historic

step comparable with that of 1989? In the prosecution of what I believe to be an historic mission under the British presidency, will my right hon. Friend—this should be complementary to and parallel with the initiatives of the European Union and the presidency—encourage British industry to become engaged in central Europe, especially in the banking and finance sector?

The desperately needed modernisation of that sector will be a prerequisite for accession, and the British banking and finance industry could make a much more significant contribution than it is making at present.

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree about the tremendous, historic importance of the decisions that were made at Luxembourg, which it is now our job to take on. For many of those countries, this is the passport to a decent and secure future, so it was indeed an historic event.

My hon. Friend may know that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary recently conducted a highly successful tour of eastern European capitals, and we are making every effort to involve British business. We are already one of the main investors in those countries, but I think that many of them are looking to us for help in precisely the areas that my hon. Friend has mentioned—banking and finance, in particular.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): At the summit, did the Prime Minister explain in terms to other Heads of Government that we intend, as from early January, to ban the import of all beef that does not meet the same high standards as British beef? Did he explain how that would be policed? Will the Meat Hygiene Service open every lorry at every port to ensure that beef coming into this country meets the same standards as beef here in the United Kingdom? Did the Prime Minister secure an undertaking from the Commission that, if we take such action, it will not result in infraction proceedings against the United Kingdom?

Did the Prime Minister also take the opportunity to explain to other Heads of Government how disappointed we would all be if the EU Veterinary Committee did not approach beef exports from the United Kingdom simply on the basis of best science?

The Prime Minister: Our position has always been that we must approach that issue on the basis of science—although, as I have said, I personally believe that recent events in the United States will help to focus the Commission's mind on the political dangers that will be posed for other European Union countries if they do not adopt the sensible approach. The certified herds scheme has been with the Commission for a long time, and the date-based scheme is under way, but things could happen much more quickly if other European countries showed real political energy.

As for specified risk material, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture has made the position clear. We will police the scheme in whatever way is appropriate. Everyone knows our position, and it is plainly right. Any legal proceedings are, of course, matters for the European Commission, but we are sure that we are taking the right action for Britain.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I agree whole-heartedly with my right hon. Friend's argument that reform of the common agriculture policy must precede enlargement, but may I make a plea for reform of the common fisheries policy? It affects fewer communities, but it is important, especially given that some would-be member states are maritime nations. If we reform the common fisheries policy, Norway may reapply to join the European Union.

The Prime Minister: I agree that reform is important. We agreed a series of measures at Amsterdam that will take that process forward. I do not know whether my hon. Friend's prediction about Norway is right, but reform of the common fisheries policy is certainly the Government's objective.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Prime Minister agree that, although short-term palliatives for the farming industry may be acceptable, bearing in mind the current crisis, what farmers are really looking forward to is a level playing field? They want the export ban lifted so that they can export into Europe. He has made it clear that the Government have proposed a date-based scheme for lifting the ban. Did he raise that issue with his colleagues in Luxembourg, and, if so, what was their response?

The Prime Minister: The matter was raised at the Agriculture Council, and I continually raised the BSE issue with all the other Heads of Government in the European Union.

The date-based scheme is the key that unlocks the door. For Northern Ireland, the certified herds scheme is a huge step forward, but for the whole of the British beef industry, a date-based scheme, once it is agreed, will mean that the lifting of the ban is set in a framework and is only a matter of time. That is why it is so important.

As I said, we have invested an enormous amount of time and energy. The Minister of Agriculture has addressed all the EU institutions, and we are making progress; although not as much as we should, because the case is far stronger than others are prepared to concede.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Will the Prime Minister confirm that other European countries accept the British position that enlargement requires the reform of the European Union budget?

The Prime Minister: Yes, they essentially accept that. They accept it in principle, and our job is to ensure that they accept it in practice.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Prime Minister tell us who will pay for meat and livestock inspections of foreign meat imports after midnight tonight?

The Prime Minister: It will be paid for in the normal way, according to normal budgetary procedures, as other measures will be.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the Prime Minister enlarge on his statement about human rights in the context of the conference? Does he agree with me that the position he inherited was extremely weak, given the lamentable attitude and isolationism of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: That is absolutely right. One of the annexes to the European Council's conclusions dealt

[The Prime Minister]

with human rights, and there was an important reaffirmation of the European Union's position. It is worth pointing out that the Copenhagen criteria on human and political rights are an enormous spur to the development of political as well as economic reform in countries wanting to join the European Union, and are one of the EU's great achievements.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Did the Prime Minister read page 13 of the Commission's Agenda 2000 document, which the Council agreed? The Commission proposes to work on harmonising member states' health care systems and on a common regulatory framework for pension funds. Did Britain table any objection?

The Prime Minister: I do not know to what the hon. Gentleman is referring, but if it is to the reforms set out in Agenda 2000, there is no question of harmonising health care systems.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I thank the Prime Minister for something that he has not already been thanked for: the decision to hold the ECOFIN meeting during the United Kingdom presidency in the city of York.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the primacy of ECOFIN over Euro X will be demonstrated on all the key political and economic decisions facing the Union, such as enlargement and reform of the CAP? Does he also agree that we shall see ECOFIN remain the key economic policy deciding body of the Union when it meets in York early in the new year under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: that is precisely what we shall see. It is important that that battle was taken on and successfully completed. As I have said, that is the view of the overwhelming majority of the European Union countries. Not many countries wanted to see ECOFIN supplanted, for obvious reasons.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Prime Minister has said that he thought that the European Union code on so-called harmful tax competition in Europe would be helpful. How helpful will that code be to the Gibraltar economy?

The Prime Minister: I am not entirely sure what impact that will have on the Gibraltar economy. *[Interruption.]* I know that we are supposed to be omniscient. If there are any implications, perhaps I can write to the hon. Gentleman and explain them. He should understand that the tax reform that is being talked about is not mandatory. It is simply to deal with certain circumstances—

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): It is mandatory.

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the shadow Chancellor, if that is what he is, would listen for a moment. It is not a mandatory reform, and it is supposed to deal with the situation in which, for example, there could be discriminatory tax practices that harm investment. British companies on the whole are keen to have it, but it is simply permissive, not mandatory. I do not know offhand whether there will be any impact on Gibraltar, but I will let the hon. Gentleman know if there is any problem.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): May I return the Prime Minister to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) about the control and inspection of meat imports? If I understood him correctly, our farmers will pay twice over. They are paying now, and they will directly have to pay a second time for the inspection of imported meat.

The Prime Minister: No, that is not right. The very reason for the checks on specified risk material is precisely to help our farmers, and that is important. Of course, it will be monitored and inspected in the normal way.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Was it agreed that ECOFIN would retain its primacy over Euro X after 1999?

The Prime Minister: Yes, but not primacy—ECOFIN is to remain the sole decision-making body. As I have said to some of the hon. Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends, that is important.

It is somewhat bizarre that those who are anti-monetary union, as I know the hon. Gentleman is, should say that this does not matter. It matters more if one dislikes monetary union than if one likes it. *[Interruption.]* Of course it does, because, when one is not in monetary union, it is all the more important that the body made up of those countries that are in monetary union has a restricted ambit.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Prime Minister has again said that there is no constitutional bar to our entry into economic and monetary union. Does that mean that no loss, however great, of political sovereignty would deter him and his Government from entering economic and monetary union, provided that what they regard as economic conditions alone were right?

The Prime Minister: No, it simply means that we should judge whether we enter monetary union according to our national interest, and that is defined by the economic tests that we have set.

There are two positions on monetary union. The first is to say that the test is essentially the national economic interest, which is what we have set out; the other is to say that it is ruled out as a matter of principle, which is presumably the hon. Gentleman's position. Those are the two positions, and it is not clear whether Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen are in the first camp or the second. The hon. Gentleman asks for elucidation of the position. He would probably be better off directing his questions to them, not to us.

Points of Order

4.34 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In response to the questions that I asked about the statement issued a week ago by the Paymaster General, the Chancellor has replied that he and his hon. Friend have nothing further to add. Is it therefore in order for the Paymaster General to have gone round the media at the weekend, responding to the very questions that he has refused to answer to the House?

That is of particular importance because, in the statement a week ago, the Paymaster General said that he had no influence of any kind over the Orion Trust, yet he admitted this weekend outside the House that he had influenced that trust to buy £10 million of shares in his own company and to buy shares in his football club.

I believe that there is a convention that if a Member has misled the House, intentionally or unintentionally, he comes to the House and puts the record straight. Have you, Madam Speaker, received any request from the Paymaster General to put the record straight concerning the statement that he previously issued, which has been incorporated in answers and which he now admits was false?

Madam Speaker: There are other points of order on the same issue, I think. I will hear them all before I respond.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any statement from the Paymaster General in respect of his making a submission to the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges or the Registrar of Members' Interests, so that he can put thoroughly on the record all his financial dealings?

That is particularly important as the List of Ministerial Responsibilities does not refer to the fact that the Paymaster General's responsibilities relate to offshore trusts, yet he admitted in public this weekend that he has responsibility for offshore trusts, and he has changed his stance in relation to whether he has control over the Orion Trust. I think that you, Madam Speaker, should ask the Paymaster General whether he is prepared to make such a submission to either the Committee or the Registrar.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Green's point of order is the same—is that right?

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): It is, Madam Speaker. For guidance, can you tell me whether it is in order for one hon. Member to call another a hypocrite? The Deputy Prime Minister should be informed whether that is parliamentary language, so that having said that yesterday on television, in respect of the Paymaster General, he could repeat it in the House.

Madam Speaker: No, no—we are not having a debate on these matters. I must answer serious points of order. The sort of language that hon. Members use outside the House is not my concern. *[Interruption.]* Just a moment. Hon. Members rather too often want to shoot off their mouths. They very seldom give the Speaker an opportunity to make a response. I believe I have another point of order. Come along, then.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I refer to a written answer by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 10 December, in which he answered a list of detailed questions by referring to the statements that the Paymaster General had placed in the Library. I have referred to those statements, which have now been shown to be misleading and untrue, because they deny in terms that he has any influence over the trustees of the Orion Trust.

As the Paymaster General admitted over the weekend that he not only influences the trust, but suggested that it carry out the share purchase which it did, I suggest that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's written answer is misleading to the House, and you, Madam Speaker, as guardian of the reputation of the House, will want to have that corrected in short order. May I ask you to require a statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer putting right the misleading and erroneous statement that he made in response to a written question on 10 December?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you take into account the powers that you have under section 141 of the Mental Health Act 1983 to investigate whether some of the Tories who have been making points of order over the past few months are suffering from amnesia? You are the only one who has that power.

Over the past 18 years, I have asked questions about the millionaire Tories in government and on their Back Benches who had money offshore—including the shadow Chancellor who, I am told, has an offshore interest in France, although it is only a little gîte—and all the others who, year after year, contrary to the views of the House, refused to record in the Register of Members' Interests all the money that they had from moonlighting jobs. It still pertains with some of them.

If there are to be investigations and continuing questions, it is high time that we took a look at what happened to the ex-Deputy Prime Minister's money. I was never told in the past, but I would like to know. As for all the other millionaires on the Opposition Front Bench, let us find out where their money is as well.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, the hon. Gentleman has already had a point of order.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Specifically on the point just raised, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: All right, in the spirit of Christmas.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has made a general point about Conservative Members not registering their interests. I have with me the Register of Members' Interests and I have looked up the entry for the Paymaster General. He has not registered the Orion Trust. Will you, Madam Speaker, investigate whether he has fully complied with the rules governing the register?

Madam Speaker: That is not a matter for me. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's original point of order, if he so wishes—and he may want to do so—he can refer many of these matters to the Parliamentary Commissioner

[Madam Speaker]

for Standards. We have our procedures, and that is where the matter should go in the first instance. He may care to take up the matter in that way.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me respond, if I may. I quite understand that the dispute and disagreement about the Paymaster General, and perhaps his appointment, relates to the Prime Minister, but the Speaker of the House should not be abused and used in this way. This matter has been taken up through the media. The Speaker must not be used in this way. We have our procedures—the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards could be used. I can tell the House that I have not received a request from the Paymaster General to make a personal statement. There must be no further points of order on this matter.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is entirely different, but it involves presents to Members of Parliament. Because of the fire at Heathrow on Friday, I was unable to get to my surgery, which was run by my deputy, Mrs. Mary Thomas. A constituent—a delightful fellow—gave her a present for me, a bottle of Campbelltown 15-year-old malt. Should I return it, or—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is being facetious. He should use his common sense. I was given a box of throat tablets the other day and I know what to do with them—distribute them to Members who have quite a lot to say for themselves.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had a request from any Minister to make a further statement on tobacco sponsorship and formula one, in the light of the disclosures in the *Financial Times* today? You will recollect that the policy of banning tobacco sponsorship of sports was rushed into by the Government in ignorance of the facts; apparently, they had no knowledge of the extent to which any sport relied on such sponsorship. The Government's policy reversal to favour formula one at the expense of other sports such as darts, snooker, show jumping and many others, followed a secret meeting with Mr. Ecclestone—who, it later emerged, was a large-scale contributor to the Labour party.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): What is the point of order?

Mr. Maude: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, he will see that it is a very clear point of order.

The solitary pretext for that reversal of policy was the contention that, without exemption, formula one would relocate elsewhere, with a consequent loss of jobs and expertise to this country. Today's disclosure in the *Financial Times* makes it clear beyond any doubt that that threat was, to use the word in the headline, "groundless". In the light of that, would not it be right for the Prime Minister or, at least, some Minister, to come before the House to apologise, to explain the real reason for exempting formula one and to tell us what else the Government are hiding?

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman's point of order was whether I had been notified that the Prime Minister or a Minister was coming to the House to make a statement, and the answer is no, I have not been so informed.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In the light of the publication shortly of the freedom of information Bill, has the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster decided to come to the House to make a statement, given the rather ironic decision to hold a council of war over the past few days on John Humphrys' asking some pertinent questions of the Secretary of State for Social Security, to which the Labour party has taken an exception?

Madam Speaker: I have no authority over such matters; I can deal only with the procedures of this House.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I congratulate you on the report in the press this weekend that you have urged the BBC not to move "Yesterday in Parliament" from its current position and to leave "The Week in Westminster" where it is on a Saturday morning. I speak for myself, but perhaps other Members also agree with you and hope that your words will be listened to by the BBC.

Madam Speaker: I have had an exchange of correspondence with the BBC, which is in the Library for all to see. There was also a useful Adjournment debate the other day.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You mentioned the spirit of Christmas. Has there been any news from the Northern Ireland Office that a Minister will come to the House to make a statement on the perilous plight of agriculture in Northern Ireland, which is now also reaching out into the pig industry?

Madam Speaker: No, I have not heard that any Northern Ireland Minister is seeking to make such a statement, but there are some days yet before the House goes into recess.

Orders of the Day

Police (Northern Ireland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.45 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time,

The aim of the Bill is to make the policing of Northern Ireland more efficient, more effective, more accountable and, as a result, more acceptable, thereby commanding increased confidence across the whole community.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on his first visit to Northern Ireland, on 16 May, shortly after taking office:

"We want to increase public confidence in policing through measured reform based on the Hayes Report on the complaints system and last year's consultation paper on structural change".

That statement set out the Government's stall on the issue of policing within Northern Ireland.

Indeed, in April 1996, when in opposition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with the support of the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), published a comprehensive consultative document on the future of policing in Northern Ireland. What we are dealing with today draws heavily on that document. It should come as no surprise to anyone that the Government are determined to push forward with the principles and structures laid down in the Bill.

As a Government, we are resolute in seeking to build on the strengths of the Royal Ulster Constabulary by putting in place new mechanisms to increase its efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and acceptability. It had been the Government's intention to proceed with our proposals through the Order in Council procedures. Strong representations were received on that point from political parties, the Police Authority, the Police Federation and others that, given the nature of the measures in the Bill, it would be more appropriate to deal with the matter through a full Bill placed before both Houses of Parliament. As a result of those representations, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agreed that it should be proceeded with in that way, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friends who are responsible for the business management of the House for finding an early slot to introduce the Bill.

The purpose of the Bill is wide ranging and, I believe, vital to the better policing of Northern Ireland. It is an objective to which the Chief Constable, the RUC and the Police Authority constantly aspire. Many changes for the better have been introduced over the years. The Bill takes that process of constructive and developing change a major step forward.

In essence, the Bill has four main strands. First, it clarifies the relative responsibilities of the Chief Constable, of the Police Authority and of the Secretary of State in the governance of policing in Northern Ireland, otherwise known as the tripartite structure. Secondly, it introduces measures to enable the wholly independent investigation of complaints against the police in Northern Ireland by establishing the office of the police ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, the Bill introduces a range of measures intended to make the RUC and the Police Authority more accountable. Fourthly, it consolidates existing Northern Ireland policing legislation, with the exception of police and criminal evidence provisions.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I know that the Minister appreciates that there are concerns in Northern Ireland about policing developments. Has his attention been drawn to the fact that about 15 people awaited the delegation when it arrived back from Downing street on Thursday, and that one suspects that they may not have been other than armed? Is that an extension of the policing that some people would like in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman will understand that I should not comment on individual cases. If he has evidence of law breaking, he—as a citizen of Northern Ireland—has a responsibility to report it to the RUC. I have taken note of his point and I will take the issue on board.

Before I describe the detail of the Bill's provisions, I should like to pay tribute to the work of those who will be most directly affected by them. I should mention first the officers—the men and women—of the RUC. There is no question but that, over the past 28 years, they have made great sacrifices—including, for some, the ultimate sacrifice of life itself—to safeguard civil society in Northern Ireland from the evils of terrorism. The figures speak for themselves: 301 officers have lost their lives because of terrorist attacks; many thousands more have been injured; and all officers, and their families, have had to live with the constant danger of terrorism.

I know that members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary take great pride in the force's record and in the fact that, despite the threat of terrorism, which remains, they continue to commit themselves to providing a community police service for all the people of Northern Ireland. The Bill's proposals will aid them in that task.

As a police service, the RUC faces unique and all too often extremely dangerous circumstances as its officers go about their daily duties. On Saturday, that fact was brought sharply into focus yet again, in Derry. Once again, the RUC was caught in the middle of the need to uphold the right of those who wished to march in recognition of their community traditions and a section of the other community that was determined to deny that right.

In a clearly orchestrated and deliberate attempt to create maximum civil disorder, RUC officers were subjected to a torrent of petrol bombs—totalling more than 1,000. Five RUC officers were injured—thankfully, none of them seriously—as they did their duty, at the risk of their lives, to protect life and property.

The conduct and actions of those who carry out such attacks threaten the very fabric of society and undermine all the good work of those, from both sides of the community, who are working so hard to provide a better future for Derry, for the north-west and for Northern Ireland as a whole. Those who took the actions have no place in a democratic society and should be universally condemned—including by those who claim to uphold the principles of democracy and non-violence as enshrined in the Mitchell principles.

No one should seek to find any excuse for the riotous behaviour that Derry suffered on Saturday night, and those who participated in it should ask themselves

[Mr. Ingram]

the fundamental questions: do they want peace and prosperity for their community, and how do their actions achieve that end?

Peace will not be achieved while there are those intent on creating mayhem and violence against their own community, and prosperity will constantly be restrained by those who resort to riot as their first and only response to what they object to.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Will the Minister—for the benefit of those who do not fully appreciate the basis of the petrol bombing—stress that 1,000 petrol bombs were thrown at the police and say by whom those bombs were thrown? It is important to establish those facts. Will he also agree that to throw 1,000 petrol bombs is not a spontaneous action but one which is preplanned by the enemies of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Ingram: I made similar points in my statement, although I will not dissent entirely from the hon. Gentleman's comments.

It is perhaps worth elaborating slightly on what happened in Derry at the weekend. There are reports of shoppers having to run for their lives as youths ripped up paving stones and threw bricks and missiles at the police. Ball-bearings were fired from catapults with sufficient force to break armoured windscreens, and high-powered lasers were directed at police lines. Lorries and vans were hijacked and driven into Guildhall square, where they were set alight.

A Littlewoods store and a branch of the Northern bank were extensively damaged by fire, and firemen attempting to deal with the fires were attacked. Windows were broken in numerous other premises, some of which were looted. Approximately 12 vehicles were hijacked and set on fire.

Initial reports suggest that the weekend's violence may have cost traders between £1 million and £5 million in damage and lost trade because of shops being closed and lost customers.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I thank the Minister for that further information on the riots in Londonderry. The nature of the information reinforces the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis)—that there was clearly some preplanning and organisation behind the riots. I repeat my hon. Friend's question: has the Minister any indication of the persons or organisation responsible for the preplanning, organisation and direction of the riots? Is it not the case—as we all know that it is—that the riots were organised by Sinn Fein-IRA? The Minister himself referred to the Mitchell principles of non-violence. Are not the actions a clear breach of those principles?

Will the Secretary of State take cognisance of the facts, or will she bury her head further in the sand? Is there any circumstance in which she will recognise the fact that is as plain as a pikestaff to everyone else: there is no genuine acceptance of the Mitchell principles by the persons concerned?

Mr. Ingram: I know that the hon. Gentleman has very strong views on the matter—

Mr. Trimble: Answer the question.

Mr. Ingram: I will answer it, but in my way, if the hon. Gentleman will give me time to do so. I am sure that he will fully understand that—although it is easy to allege—culpability must be proven under the rule of law. Initially, it is for the Chief Constable and the RUC to establish the facts of the matter. I have stated the major extent of the problem and talked about an orchestrated set of actions, based on the initial information that I have received. I am not yet in a position to attach blame or to take action.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) appreciates my point about the need for proper investigation of the incident. He will also know that, after Saturday's events, some people have been charged and have appeared in court. It is a matter to be handled according to due process of law, and that is how it should remain.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I have a very simple question. This morning, the chairman of the Bogside community association was on the BBC and said that that riot could have been organised in five minutes. Does the Minister believe that?

Mr. Ingram: I have never organised a riot, so I do not know. The hon. Gentleman may have given some advice on it, but I have never done so. I do not know whether it takes five minutes or five hours. However, I have been very clear in the statements that I have given.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the Minister agree that both this Government and the previous Government have consistently said that Sinn Fein and the IRA were two sides of the same coin? Is it not significant that one Sinn Fein member who was entertained last week at No. 10 Downing street was prominent in Londonderry on the day of the riots and—judging from photographs taken of him—approved of what was going on? Is the Minister aware that senior police officers in Londonderry have unequivocally attributed organisation of the riots to the IRA?

Mr. Ingram: I have pointed out the facts of the matter. I said that it was easy to make allegations, but that allegations have to be proved in a court of law. I am sure that, as an eminent Queen's counsel, the hon. and learned Gentleman is only too well aware of that. It is a matter for those who investigate such incidents and apply the law; it is not directed by politicians or, indeed, by Ministers.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I have been a regular visitor to the city of Derry. Indeed, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) thinks that I am on the electoral register there. Over the years, I have noticed how the citizens have rebuilt that beautiful city where there is now a burgeoning of civic pride. The city has attracted inward investment and tourism from around the world. I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that the incident that took place at the weekend was shocking and disgraceful, and that it does no good whatsoever for the citizens' attempts to promote that marvellous city.

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend makes a very strong point with which I agree whole-heartedly. I have visited Derry several times—at least once, I think, with him. I have worked closely with city councillors, officials and others to try to stimulate economic regeneration in what

is undoubtedly a difficult area in Northern Ireland because of its relative remoteness from the centre. I have no doubt that the work of those who seek to create economic opportunities there will have been damaged by the events of the weekend. That is why I thought it important to set forth the Government's views on those events and why I said that peace and prosperity go hand in hand and will undoubtedly have been damaged by what happened.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I agree with the Minister that the violence that took place at the weekend was absolutely appalling. It cannot be excused in any way, and I cannot imagine circumstances in which it could be excused. Does he agree that there is something that we can prove, which is that many people in Derry, including my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), Church leaders, business leaders and civic leaders, tried their best to prevent the events of the weekend? The majority of people of the city did not want them to happen, and most would agree with my condemnation of the violence.

Mr. Ingram: I whole-heartedly agree with those sentiments and welcome the hon. Gentleman's contribution. He speaks for the greater part of public opinion in Derry and the wider area of the north-west of the Province.

I was paying tribute to the RUC. I also pay tribute to the members and staff of the Police Authority as they, too, have operated under the shadow of threat and attack. The Government and the community in Northern Ireland are indebted to them as well.

The proposals in the Bill will enhance the role of the authority in representing the community and holding the Chief Constable to account by refocusing and redefining the role of the authority. I know that those who serve on the authority will rise to the new challenges and actively participate in the reworking of the relationships between the authority, the community, the Government and the police service.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister is paying tribute to the members of the Police Authority, but will he give us some more information about the extent to which the authority has been consulted on the Bill? Is it not the case that the authority is strongly opposed to it? Is it not also the case that, since 1 May, it has repeatedly sought meetings with the Secretary of State in order to express its opposition, but that the Secretary of State has refused such meetings?

Mr. Ingram: That is not at all accurate. There have been a number of meetings at various levels. I met the chairman and senior members of the authority, and officials have met the authority's representatives several times. Over the summer, while the legislation was being developed, we repeatedly offered to provide the authority with senior officials to explain it, but our offers were not initially accepted. However, I think that we have now set out a detailed approach.

I want to touch on some of the ways in which the authority will be engaged in the process. As for the authority's whole-hearted or fundamental opposition—I cannot remember the hon. Gentleman's exact words—I am not aware of it. We are still engaged in discussion and consultation with the authority to take forward the principles of the Bill, and I shall comment on that in detail a little later.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the Police Authority is a genuinely representative civic body, or does he plan to modify it in some way?

Mr. Ingram: I shall come on to that a little later. I shall want to comment specifically on the structure of the Police Authority and our proposals for it.

I was paying tribute to the RUC and the Police Authority. I also want to mention the past and present members of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints, who have played an important part in the accountability framework for the police, again in difficult circumstances. The Bill is intended to enhance that framework, both through proposals to reform the tripartite structure governing policing in Northern Ireland and through the reform of the police complaints system, with the creation of an independent police ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

It is intended that the existing staff of the commission will form the core of the ombudsman's office. I know that the current members of the commission will continue to perform their function professionally until the ombudsman's office is created, and I thank them publicly for that.

I now touch briefly on the political process. The present talks represent a real chance for peace for everyone in Northern Ireland. As hon. Members will know, the talks are taking place on an open agenda. Many important issues, including policing, are being or will be discussed there. That is as it should be.

The proposals in the Bill are not designed to preclude discussion of policing in the talks. Indeed, the Government have given an undertaking that any agreement reached in talks on the issues covered in the Bill will be taken on board during the passage of the Bill, if that is practicable. If not, they will be implemented at a later stage. In the meantime, we think that the real benefits that these proposals will bring to the people of Northern Ireland should be delivered as soon as possible. The provisions lay down a new foundation for policing in Northern Ireland. They offer great opportunities, and do not pose a threat to anyone.

Let me turn to the detail of the proposals. The Bill introduces to Northern Ireland police planning and objective setting mechanisms, similar to those that already operate in England and Wales. They will allow the Secretary of State and the Police Authority to set the priorities for policing in Northern Ireland. The Chief Constable will then be required to produce a plan, showing how he will police Northern Ireland in the light of those priorities.

That plan will be approved and published by the Police Authority before the beginning of the financial year. Within four months of the end of the year for which the plan was written, the Police Authority will provide a public assessment in its annual report of the Chief Constable's performance in carrying out the plan. The police planning and objective setting provisions have already been brought into effect in Northern Ireland, on a non-statutory basis.

[Mr. Ingram]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced her objectives for policing for 1998–99 on 25 November, and the Police Authority is to announce its objectives soon. The priorities that my right hon. Friend has set for the police are security, public order, burglary, violent crime, traffic and drugs.

Those are all important matters, which the police must tackle efficiently and effectively if we are to secure our goal of making life better for everyone in Northern Ireland by reducing the disruption, distress and fear brought to the lives of ordinary people every day by criminals pursuing their nefarious activities.

The Government fully recognise the importance of protecting the operational independence of the police, as the safeguard for police impartiality and freedom from partisan political control. We recognise the key role of the Police Authority, as envisaged in the Hunt report, in securing that. The Bill follows the well-established precedent of the tripartite structure developed in England and Wales.

The Police Authority will receive the funds for policing from the Secretary of State and set the budget on foot of the policing plan.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the Bill not give more power to the Secretary of State? Anyone who knows anything about policing in Northern Ireland realises that it makes radical changes. Are the Government trying to give the Secretary of State the same control over the police as the Minister of Justice in the Irish republic has?

Mr. Ingram *indicated dissent.*

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is no use the Minister shaking his head. The people of Northern Ireland know about policing. Everybody knows that the Police Authority is not in favour of the changes. It is amazing that the Minister has not got that message.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman's assessment of the Bill is wrong. It does not give the Secretary of State equivalent powers to those exercised by the Department of Justice in the Republic of Ireland, which is his main charge. I have explained that we are in close consultation with the Police Authority. I understand that there was an emergency meeting of the Police Authority last week to discuss some of the matters that I had asked it to consider. I am awaiting its response on an implementation plan. The allegation that the Police Authority is wholly opposed to the proposals is not borne out by the events. Our discussions are proceeding.

The Police Authority will delegate to the Chief Constable, who is empowered to act on its behalf, management responsibility for all the resources needed to deliver the policing service. That includes those civilian staff who work in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, so bringing together into one unitary service—to be called the Northern Ireland police service—all those, both constables and civilians, working to provide the policing service.

We have introduced the new title to reflect the overall service being provided. However, the title of the Royal Ulster Constabulary will remain. The Government have no plans to dispense with that title.

The Police Authority will have overall responsibility for the police grant and will hold the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of the policing service and for his utilisation of resources. Those proposals will bring policing arrangements in Northern Ireland into line with those in the rest of the United Kingdom, with clearly defined and logically structured responsibilities and lines of accountability.

The creation of the office of police ombudsman is another important feature of the Bill. Before I get into the detail, I am sure that hon. Members would like to join me in paying tribute to Dr. Maurice Hayes for his independent report, presented to the previous Administration in January this year. He produced an excellent study of police complaints, and I believe that our proposals do justice to his recommendations.

I shall refer to two key points in that report. It said:

"The overwhelming message I got from nearly all sides and from all political parties was the need for the investigation to be independent and to be seen to be independent. While there were systemic failings in the present arrangements they lacked credibility because of lack of independence, because it was the Chief Constable who decided what was a complaint, because there was no power of initiative, and because the complaints were investigated by police officers."

The other key point is that while public confidence is paramount, it should not be gained at the expense of police confidence. The police must accept and support the new system if it is to work effectively. I believe that our proposals will enjoy the confidence of the police and the community.

As well as establishing the office of ombudsman, the Bill provides for an independent figure—the ombudsman himself—who will be appointed by royal warrant. He or she will have control of the process, deciding what a complaint is, how it is to be investigated and by whom. Investigation will, as now, be required by statute in certain categories of case. The ombudsman can also call himself or herself in, meeting a long-standing recommendation of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints.

I have already suggested that some within the current ICPC staff will be well able to fill the posts, but I expect there to be direct recruits as well, selected by the ombudsman. In addition, initially at least, there will be a small number of temporary service police officers drawn from forces across the United Kingdom. They will be selected by the ombudsman and will be under his or her direction and control.

Those are new arrangements for Northern Ireland—indeed, for the United Kingdom—but they are not unprecedented. They are the result of painstaking research in many jurisdictions, including Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The establishment of the office of independent ombudsman provides a guarantee to the public that in cases involving alleged police misconduct, justice will not only be done but be seen to be done. It is also a guarantee to the vast majority of dedicated, hard-working police officers, who maintain the highest standards of personal integrity, that their work with the community cannot be undone by malicious allegations and innuendo. They will have the advantage of being examined not by the police but by the independent ombudsman.

The work required to translate the provisions into practical arrangements is on-going. Steering and working groups involving the police, the ICPC and police staff bodies are being set up. That is an open approach. It is how it should be.

To show the Government's commitment, we have already been looking at transitional arrangements to smooth the implementation of the proposals. We have, for example, made the chairman of the ICPC a full-time post and have allocated money, in a tight financial climate, to begin the work required on computerisation for the new office.

The proposals on the ombudsman have received support from nearly all political parties, the Chief Constable, the chairman of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints and police staff associations in Northern Ireland. I hope that that support will be reflected today when the House votes on the Bill.

The Bill also changes the declaration of office made by RUC constables to a form broadly similar to that used to affirm constables in office in Scotland. That is in line with a series of other changes in recent years to oaths or declarations of office throughout the criminal justice system in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland. Outdated and overly complex language has been eliminated and new, clear, simple wording used. The new declaration states:

"I hereby do solemnly and sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of Constable."

That is clear, simple wording.

The role of the police, in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the United Kingdom, is not to uphold one political view over another. It is impartially and effectively to protect life and property, to preserve order, to prevent crime, and to bring offenders to justice. That is what the declaration of office commits RUC officers to. They are also aims that all right-thinking people ascribe to. In the fulness of time, I am sure that more and more from the nationalist community will wish to join the RUC, to the benefit of the whole community.

The Bill also gives the Secretary of State the power to issue codes of practice to the Police Authority relating to the discharge of its functions. The purpose of that power is to enable the Secretary of State to ensure that the authority follows best practice on openness, community consultation and financial oversight.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the Minister really believe that the form of oath that a constable takes has any bearing on whether members of the minority community in Northern Ireland join the police force? Will he accept that there is such low recruitment from the minority community because its members are murdered, maimed and ostracised, and find it impossible to live in the communities where they grew up?

Mr. Ingram: There is no question but that they do suffer that type of harassment and victimisation, and that poses a great deterrent to joining the RUC. Through the talks process, we are trying to normalise Northern Ireland society. To do that, we have to lay down a framework on which to build for the future, instead of continually dwelling on concepts and structures that relate solely to the past. The hon. and learned Gentleman should think more about the future and worry less about the past; he should help us to build structures for that future.

The Secretary of State's transferred power to issue codes of practice will enable her to ensure that the authority follows best practice as regards openness, community consultation and financial oversight. The Bill also gives the Secretary of State power to issue guidance to the police in Northern Ireland, to enable her to issue circulars detailing best practice to the RUC, just as the Home Secretary issues such circulars to police forces in England and Wales. That will make relationships between the Secretary of State and the Police Authority and the RUC more tangible and transparent.

One of the main underlying purposes of the Bill is to improve links between the police and local communities. As part of that, the Government want to ensure that district councils in Northern Ireland are better informed about policing arrangements there. The Bill therefore makes provision for district councils to ask questions of the Police Authority, and requires the authority to send one or more members to a meeting of the district council to answer such questions, provided suitable notice is given. I am sure that that important step will be welcomed by all who serve on district councils and by the wider community.

I should also like to mention one other major piece of related work arising from our 1996 paper. We hope to publish shortly after Christmas a consultation document seeking views on the method and appointment of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and on ways of developing links between the police and the community. I believe that that deals with the point about our wish that everyone should participate in the consultation process.

I call on the House to support the Government in introducing these reforms; they will help to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland continue to receive the highest standards of policing service. The reforms are sensible, moderate and timely measures which will enable the police service in Northern Ireland to evolve to face whatever challenges the future holds, while developing partnership with the whole community. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.22 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The House will be grateful to the Minister of State for sparing the time to give us more information about the disturbances in Londonderry during the past few days. I also entirely endorse what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) had to say, although I must tell him gently that it was in marked contrast to the comments made by one of his political colleagues. In the heat of the moment on the streets of Londonderry—

Mr. Mallon: I am not sure to which of my colleagues the hon. Gentleman is referring. The difficulty lies in a refusal to accept that there may be two groups of people who did not do what was right. If I am lucky enough to catch the Chair's eye, I shall have things to say about policing with which the hon. Gentleman will not agree. Criticising the police is one thing; it should never be misinterpreted as supporting the acts of violence perpetrated in Derry. That distinction must always be clear, and I make it on behalf of whichever colleague the hon. Gentleman was referring to.

Mr. MacKay: I am grateful for the distinction. I was referring to Mark Durkan, who, in the heat of the moment,

[Mr. MacKay]

did not draw that distinction. On radio news bulletins that day, he said that it was the Royal Ulster Constabulary that was causing the violence—which was regrettable. I am glad that the matter has been cleared up, and I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will refer further to it in his own speech.

I also strongly believe that the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) was right to point out the damage caused to a beautiful city that was hugely restored and reinvigorated—I do not make a party political point—during our 18 years in government. I hope that that will be kept up by this Government. As the Minister said, there is a real need to help Londonderry, because its location and economic circumstances do not make things easy.

The violence, however, was clearly premeditated. I do not expect the Minister to comment, but press reports emanating from the security forces, and seemingly accurate, state that Sinn Fein-IRA were behind these actions. That is deeply regrettable, not least because the violence came straight after their leaders had accepted the Prime Minister's invitation to Downing street—an invitation that we thought was decidedly premature. I regret to say that what has happened confirms that Sinn Fein-IRA have not signed up to the democratic process; they have certainly not condemned violence.

No debate on the structure or role of the police service in Northern Ireland can begin without the strongest possible tribute to the men and women of the RUC and the RUC Reserve. I hope that that tribute has the unanimous backing of Members of all parties, including those from Northern Ireland. Throughout 27 years of sustained, wicked and vicious terrorist campaigns, it is the RUC that has for the most part stood in the front line. The RUC has borne the brunt and has often had to pay the ultimate price.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the statistics. Since the troubles began in 1969, 199 RUC and 102 RUC Reserve officers have been killed as a result of terrorist violence; and 8,326 have been seriously injured or maimed. Those appalling numbers serve to highlight the dangers that the police have faced—dangers that cannot be compared with those facing any other force in the UK. The main perpetrators of these foul deeds have been the IRA, whose political apologists are now represented at the Stormont talks. For all their posturing outside Downing street last Thursday, and all their talk of signing up to the principles of democracy and non-violence, it speaks volumes about these men that they have never uttered a word of apology to the victims of these murderous deeds. But we do not forget.

The RUC has also suffered at the hands of loyalists. Those who over the years have cast doubt on the impartiality of the RUC should remember the intimidation and violence directed at many of its officers after the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. They should also remember the splendid way in which the force, under so much pressure from parts of the Unionist community, stood firm and held together.

The only crime committed by the men and women of the RUC—in the eyes of their opponents—is that they have been carrying out their duties to serve the entire community. They have upheld the rule of law in Northern Ireland and defended all its people—Unionist and nationalist—against terrorism. They have defended democracy and freedom and ensured that the constitution of Northern Ireland will ultimately be determined by the people of Northern Ireland and not by the gunman. Let us be clear that it will never be decided by violence or the real or implied threat of violence.

Mr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his characteristic courtesy. Is he saying that if he were lucky enough to be a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, he would not sit down at the negotiating table with representatives of Sinn Fein?

Mr. MacKay: No. The hon. Gentleman, who takes an assiduous interest in our Northern Ireland debates, was in his place last Thursday when, in response to the Minister, I made it clear that we would be talking to Sinn Fein-IRA at ministerial and civil service levels at appropriate times and that we supported the talks that are talking place at Stormont, and that include Sinn Fein-IRA. I repeat what I said earlier: it is unfortunate that one of the parties at the talks still condones violence and does not seem to have properly signed up to the democratic process. However, that does not imply that I do not think that the talks should be continuing.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his condemnation of violence which is shared by every Labour Member. We have maintained that position for the past 27 years, without any departure or deviation from that stance. Although I understand—but certainly do not share—the hon. Gentleman's criticism of what happened last week, does he accept, nevertheless, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did what he did because he believed it to be in the national interest and not because he had any sympathy with Sinn Fein-IRA? Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister believed that what he did was in the national interest, bearing in mind the talks that are taking place in Northern Ireland. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that?

Mr. MacKay: I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman. First, I entirely believe that every Opposition Member renounces violence, and that is part of the strength of this Parliament. The hon. Gentleman alludes to my public disagreement with the Prime Minister over the invitation of Sinn Fein-IRA leaders to Downing street. That is a matter of judgment. I believe that the Prime Minister's judgment is wrong and I have said so to him privately, but equally I agree that he is acting with the sincerest of motives. I hope that that completely satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

As I was saying, the outcome of any talks will never be decided by violence or the real or implied threat of violence. There can be no concession on that fundamental principle.

The RUC has displayed not only incredible bravery in the face of terrorism, but the highest standards of dedication and professionalism. The Opposition do not recognise the bitter, twisted and distorted picture of the RUC that has been painted by the propagandists of Sinn Fein-IRA and their fellow travellers. Slogans about the RUC being unacceptable in nationalist areas will be vehemently rejected by the Opposition, as will the calls that will inevitably be repeated inside and outside the talks, as the

debate moves on, for the RUC to be disbanded. To be replaced by what, I ask—by the vigilante gangsters and that which passes for IRA justice, by thugs with baseball bats, nails and guns and by the IRA as judge, jury and executioner within the nationalist community?

While of course there is a debate to be had about the nature of policing in Northern Ireland, let us at least be clear that the RUC is the only legitimate police force in Northern Ireland, that it will remain the legitimate police force for Northern Ireland and that there can be no such thing as no-go areas for the RUC.

The reality, unbearable as it is for the terrorists, is that the RUC has been one of the central elements that has stood between the rule of law and the descent into anarchy and chaos—a real force for stability in Northern Ireland. Let us not underestimate the difficulties of policing a divided society. The Minister referred to that today in introducing the Bill, to which I now turn.

The most obvious manifestation of the community divide is the imbalance in the composition of the force between those from a Unionist or Protestant background and those from a Roman Catholic or nationalist background. As the House will acknowledge, there are no easy answers to the problem.

Since the creation of the RUC out of the remnants of the old Royal Irish Constabulary in 1922, Roman Catholics have been under-represented on the force, despite the fact that initially a third of the places were reserved for them. The historical reasons for that are well documented and it is fruitless to dwell on them for too long.

Today, the main obstacle for many is not necessarily the nature of the force, but the fear of intimidation from within the communities in which they live. That view is reinforced by the Police Authority in its document, "Listening to the Community—Working with the RUC", which states:

> "Fear of being attacked or ostracised from within their own community is undoubtedly a major factor but it may also be that Catholics feel they have to submerge their cultural and religious background to fit within the RUC."

One of the most encouraging and interesting facts about the period before the previous IRA ceasefire is that applications to join the RUC from Catholics doubled from about 11 per cent. to 22 per cent. I gather that the figure is currently around 17 per cent. Surely that demonstrates that the establishment of political stability will do more than any institutional reform to attract more applicants from the nationalist community.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I note the point that he has made. I should like to ask him to clarify one thing. The figures are that in 1923, 21 per cent. of RUC officers were Catholics; in 1929, 19 per cent. were Catholics; in 1969, 11 per cent. were Catholics; and in 1997, 8 per cent. are Catholics. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is more to the problem of the non-identification of the Catholic community with policing than the physical threat that undoubtedly comes from the IRA and that there is a deeper dimension to it, which we must address if we are to solve the problem?

Mr. MacKay: Yes, of course I do. I hope that I have already been doing that. It is precisely why we are here tonight discussing the legislation so there is no disagreement between us on that point.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that although Roman Catholics are under-represented in the RUC, they are better represented among the officer ranks?

Mr. MacKay: That is my understanding. If the hon. Gentleman and I are mistaken, I know that the Minister will correct us.

The Police Authority report, to which I have been referring, considers a number of possible measures that might help to create what it describes as a neutral working environment. Those are rightly excluded from the scope of the Bill, except in one respect: the proposed change to the so-called RUC oath.

I agreed with the words of the Secretary of State in her press release of 4 December that accompanied the publication and First Reading of the Bill. She said:

> "Unfortunately much of the debate on this issue is focused on names and symbols. These are significant matters, but we believe now is the time to concentrate on reforming the future structure and style of policing."

If that is her view, why does she feel it necessary to bring forward at this delicate stage in the political talks such root-and-branch reform of the oath of office that is taken by police officers on their appointment?

I shall be clear so that there is no misunderstanding. The Opposition do not necessarily oppose the move to the Scottish declaration. We are satisfied that the Chief Constable, the Police Authority and the Police Federation have all been consulted and are content with—or, it would be better to say, can live with—the proposed change. If the change leads to more Catholic applicants, we shall of course welcome it.

We also understand the potency of symbols in Northern Ireland. Change in that area should be approached carefully and very cautiously. Many people in Northern Ireland are rightly concerned about the future of the police force. They think that changing the oath is simply the thin end of the wedge, leading to full-scale reform of every element of the RUC with which they currently identify. I ask the Government to give an assurance to the people of Northern Ireland that there will be no attempt radically to overhaul the RUC without the widest possible consultation and full-hearted consent of all representative bodies of the RUC; that the future of the police, while not excluded from the talks, will not become a bargaining chip in those talks.

We broadly agree with the policy of promoting respect for the two traditions, which the Government inherited, but it must never become, or be seen to have become, a policy of making concessions to one side of the community without parallel assurances and guarantees to the other. We trust that the Government and Ministers will continue to remember that.

We have no objection to the broad thrust and the main substance of the Government's proposals. It was, after all, the Conservative party that identified in the previous Parliament the need to reform the tripartite relationship between the Secretary of State, the Chief Constable and the Police Authority. The Bill builds sensibly on the foundations that we laid and implements a number of

[Mr. MacKay]

changes—most notably, the establishment of a police ombudsman—which were recommended by Dr. Maurice Hayes in his review of the police complaints system in Northern Ireland. I share the Minister's commendation of Dr. Hayes's work.

For all the reasons that I have given, the Opposition intend to give the Bill an unopposed Second Reading. If we may, we shall return to some of the detail in Committee.

5.42 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): In addressing this problem, as we all must, I recognise the difficulties inherent in it for someone such as me. I want to make my position clear: I believe that there is a fundamental problem of policing in the north of Ireland that has existed since the formation of the state and has never been fundamentally addressed. Until it is, the problem will remain, not go away. Sooner or later, we must deal with it.

That was not an attack on, or a criticism of, the police. I have enough grounds sometimes to make attacks on certain police officers and their behaviour without making them part of a political debate, which I hope I do not do. I want to focus initially on what I believe is the core issue. It can be put in many ways. The hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) has identified the core of the problem: the inability—the refusal, as it were—of a broad nationalist community in the north of Ireland to give its support and allegiance to a system of policing in Northern Ireland.

Such an inability or refusal has existed since the very foundation of the state. It cannot be solved by simplifying the issue by getting Catholics into the police service. It is much broader, deeper and more fundamental than that. It is about nationalist identification with the process of policing and allegiance not just to the police as one part of the instrument of administration but to the administration that is partly responsible for administering policing.

That is the core of the problem and that is why I believe it is central to the negotiations that are taking place. A policing service that operates on the basis of consensus, which commands the support and allegiance of all sectors of the community, is one of the hallmarks of a properly functioning civil society. It is essential, then, that the negotiations address not only how we govern ourselves, with the consent of all sectors, but how we police our society, enforce its laws, protect the individual and maintain community stability.

I do not believe that we have any choice but to reassess from the very first principles the policing requirements of a divided society that is enjoying the beginnings of peace. We must fundamentally reappraise how we deliver a policing service, its ethos, structures, accountability, control and the legal framework in which it operates. I believe more and more that the policing problem cannot be solved in isolation from the political process; policing and political problems in the north of Ireland are interlocked and entwined. I am quite sure that we cannot solve one if we fail to solve the other. If we do not solve either, the problem is beyond resolution.

It is only through political discussion, negotiation and dialogue that we will agree a system of policing that commands the support, involvement and allegiance of all the people of the north of Ireland. Whatever edict, whatever Bill, whatever is handed down from this Parliament, whatever the composition of the Government, that fundamental reality is one with which we must all deal. It is the most difficult one because there are no cop-outs, no things that can be left out if we do not like them, no ways in which we can sidestep it. It is the fundamental question that must be asked—and sooner rather than later.

I want no ambiguity about my position on this issue. My position is very clear. When I talk about nationalist support for policing, I am not talking about a verbal presentation. I am talking about people in nationalist areas joining the police service, defending it, being part of it and creating an ethos of support for policing in the communities in which they serve. That has not happened in the lifetime of the state of the north of Ireland. That is why, when we try to change fundamentally the nature of the way in which the north of Ireland operates—call it a new dispensation, or whatever—at its core are changes in attitudes to policing that inherently demand changes in policing itself.

That process will ask questions of the nationalist community, because it will have to make the quantum leap between being outside the whole ethos of policing and being part of the creation of the new dispensation for the administration of the north of Ireland. It will also ask a positive question of the Unionist community. The deep emotional bond that it feels for a police service that it sees as its own must change, because it is not that community's police service. No section of the community, in any healthy society, can regard policing as its own. That attitude must change because it must accommodate a police service that is part of the entire community. That historic and symbolic legacy, which has wedded policing almost exclusively to a Unionist perception, must give way to a new ethos that the entire community can identify with and share in. That is the real nature of the policing problem and shows how fundamental it is. That is why I am disappointed in the Bill. I shall give my reasons in more detail later.

The problem is much deeper than anything covered by the Bill. It is a deep-seated political problem that goes to the heart of the political entity that is the north of Ireland. Consequently, a wider and deeper responsibility transcends operational or administrative matters and places the problem of policing as a central, legitimate and compelling part of the political debate, the political process and the political negotiations that are currently taking place.

I was disappointed when the hon. Member for Bracknell tilted at windmills when he mentioned the disbandment of the RUC. I know of no one in the House who has advocated that. It will not happen and I have never advocated it. I have advocated fundamental change at the heart of policing that will allow the police service, in its political dimension, to start to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem. Therefore, I examined the Bill for signposts that the involvement and allegiance of the whole community will be catered for. Such signposts are difficult to find, but perhaps it is not that sort of Bill and the Minister's answer would be that the Bill did not set out to do that.

I also examined the Bill for signs that it met the requirements that must be met if we are successfully to police a divided society. The Bill will, to give it credit, partially do that. Does the Bill point to the changes in the

ethos, composition and identity of policing that must be made? Yes, one could say that it contains a small element of those changes. Does it include the all-encompassing respect for human rights and community awareness that will be essential? Those factors are scarce in the Bill, although those that are present have heavy implications.

I regret that the Bill has been introduced at this stage; I would have preferred the talks process to have developed further before its introduction. Unfortunately, the Bill is a statement of the limitations of change rather than a clear indicator of a vision and willingness to pursue the meaningful change that will be required. I may be being unfair to the Bill—doubtless the Minister will claim that the Bill was not intended to achieve that—but at this stage of our history and the negotiations, the Government should have gone out of their way to include those signposts in the Bill.

I welcome the change in the affirmation or oath, although I do not believe that it will make any fundamental difference to the problem. In that, I agree with the hon. Member for Bracknell. The change in the oath is welcome because it clearly defines the role of the police and it does away with a symbol. Symbols are important. In her statement when the Bill was published, the Secretary of State referred to symbols and name changes. The Bill will make a few symbolic changes and a few name changes. The change in the oath is one of the signposts that are needed.

The addition of Northern Ireland police service to the name of the RUC in the definition of the Police Authority in the Bill is cosmetic and devoid of substance. It is a contrived distinction between a police force, as defined, and a police service, as defined. It will satisfy no one and serves to embarrass, because it achieves only a curious balance that is not part of the debate. It is two names welded together in the hope that the two will stick, but they will not stick because the fundamental issue has not been addressed.

I welcome the appointment of a police ombudsman, because it will be an opportunity to improve the quality of management of police complaints and to enhance public confidence in the police and the handling of complaints. That is crucial and I commend the report and recommendations of Dr. Maurice Hayes on the subject, but is it too grudging to suggest to the Minister that the potential of the ombudsman is in danger of being squandered by aspects of the Bill as at present drafted?

In paragraph 11.2, the Hayes report made clear its fundamental position on police complaints when it stated:

"The overriding requirement which was impressed on me from all sides . . . was independence, independence, independence."

That must be the measure by which we judge the Bill and I question whether it has got the tenure of office of the ombudsman right. The appointment of an ombudsman should not be determined by and dependent on whichever Secretary of State is in charge at any given time. It should be above and beyond that. The period of the ombudsman's appointment should not require, as the Bill demands, the sanction of a Secretary of State, because independence will be crucial. It is not any old run-of-the-mill appointment to some board or trust. The police ombudsman, whoever he or she may be, will have to step on some powerful toes, be they policing toes, administrative toes or political toes. That person will need the strength given by security of tenure to do that. I ask the Minister to go back to the Hayes report and read what Dr. Hayes recommended in paragraph 11.10—

"the full-time commitment of a single person with perhaps a couple of deputies."

The report continued:

"Full-time membership too for all members would improve staff management and morale and would make it easier to manage the work load."

In paragraph 11.17, the report says that the post should be a full-time one,

"removable only by a process of impeachment."

To have the independence that is required, the ombudsman should not be dependent for tenure of office on the position and the decision of a Secretary of State. There are ways around the problem which will be probed in Committee, but it is crucial to make that point at this stage.

Mr. Trimble: I am interested in the serious point that the hon. Gentleman is making; it is one to which we would not be unsympathetic. However, making the ombudsman completely secure in his position—similar to a High Court judge—is not necessarily the best way to proceed. I quote, as an example, the chief electoral commissioner to show the disadvantages of making people irremovable. I take the point that it may be undesirable for the Secretary of State to have the power of dismissal in the event of someone not acting efficiently or effectively, but might it be possible to find another procedure—including a representative police authority—as the basis from which to proceed?

Mr. Mallon: I note the skill with which the hon. Gentleman makes his point, which was not the point I was making. I take the reference to having someone in a position who is not adequate for it when there is no power of removal. Surely we must return to the Hayes report's comment on impeachment and rely on that.

The second area of the Bill that falls short of the objective of independence is the implicit suggestion that the ombudsman's office will investigate only some of the complaints against the police, with the rest—possibly the greater number—being investigated by the police themselves, as is currently the case.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the thrust of the Bill on this point seems to be that the case will be dealt with informally if the complainant agrees? If the complainant does not agree, it would appear that the matter will be dealt with by the ombudsman.

Mr. Mallon: That is correct in terms of a complaint that is to be dealt with informally, but it is not correct in relation to the second category of complaint. The first category is mandatory on the ombudsman—the second is not. The third category is where the complainant's view is sovereign. I believe that it should be sovereign in other cases and it is for that reason I am making my point.

If police complaints are not leased from the ombudsman, how will the ombudsman's office be able to function on a budget of £2 million when at present it is £7 million? That must be answered. The answer is that it can function only if complaints are leased out and dealt with by a police complaints bureau, rather than by an independent body. Will the Minister state how the new body—which will have set-up expenses—will do a better job than the Independent Commission for Police

[Mr. Mallon]

Complaints on a budget that is £5 million less than the current budget, other than by farming out cases to the police themselves to investigate?

The third basic flaw—probably the most basic flaw in the Bill—is in schedule 3. Paragraph 5(1) requires the ombudsman to appoint members of the police to carry out investigations into complaints against the police. It is not a matter of he might or he could, but that he shall

"enter into arrangements for members of the police force to be engaged for a period of temporary service with the Ombudsman."

That is a long way from paragraph 13.67 of the Hayes report, which states:

"RUC officers could be involved, whether as direct recruits or on secondment, at the discretion of the Ombudsman."

That is not in the Bill, which requires the ombudsman to appoint members of the RUC. The Hayes report continues that

"the Ombudsman should select and recruit the officers."

However, where the ombudsman does not agree with the Chief Constable on that, lo and behold, who does the Bill propose should have the responsibility? The Secretary of State.

The ombudsman is replacing the ICPC—the current body—which was criticised for not being sufficiently independent although, by statute, serving or former police officers were prohibited from its membership. That is a fundamental flaw. Have we not got to a stage in terms of the policing of Northern Ireland—with all of its problems—where we can have total independence, at least in terms of police complaints, without intrusion and without dilution of the most fundamental proposal?

How can the proposal be reconciled with the principle of independence, or with public confidence? One wonders how it can be reconciled with the principles of fair employment and equal opportunities, particularly given the present composition of the organisation from which seconded police officers will be drawn.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): The hon. Gentleman is making rather heavy weather of this point. Clause 57 allows the ombudsman to appoint a police officer and gives the ombudsman the power to supervise any investigation that is carried out. It also allows members of police forces from Great Britain—and not Northern Ireland—to undertake investigations. I am very much enjoying his speech, but the hon. Gentleman appears partly to be saying that he does not have confidence in the ombudsman to make such arrangements and undertake effective supervision.

Mr. Mallon: On the contrary, I could express confidence in the ombudsman. If the ombudsman saw fit, in certain circumstances, to appoint members of the RUC, I would accept it. If the ombudsman saw fit to appoint police officers from England, Scotland or Wales—or from the Europe, or the Republic of Ireland—I would accept that. I do not accept that the Bill should determine for the ombudsman that he appoint members of the RUC. He should have the option, as presented in the Hayes report, but it is made mandatory in the Bill.

The Bill raises other factors, some of which relate to experience. I accept that a serving police officer would have an entrée into the police service that others may not have, but is it the type of entrée that one would wish? Does he have the type of training that one would wish? When one looks at the vast amount of investigative skills that are employed in social services, agriculture and every other civil Department, one wonders why those skills cannot be sought and that training cannot be applied in relation to the Bill.

It will be argued that RUC officers would bring an understanding of police culture and procedure, which of course they would, but that is not the most convincing of arguments. Police culture has many flaws, not least the lack of awareness among many who are inculcated in it of its own manifestations, misrepresentations and insidiousness.

That is not my criticism: it started with the Scarman inquiry and has been made on the record down the years. It was considered in a recent report commissioned by the RUC itself. I believe that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has asked for a copy, and I hope that it will get it, because it is of fundamental importance.

The allegation in the confidential report is that 29 per cent. of all serving Catholic members say that they have experienced religious harassment. That is only one element of the report. I hope that it will come to light and be used and that it will be recognised that the police culture is not necessarily the best culture in which to investigate complaints against the police.

It may be that the provision is included to satisfy elements in the police service, or should I say the police force—I keep getting it wrong—because of the proposed changes in the north of Ireland. Is it there to satisfy the Police Federation? If so, it risks the independence of the ombudsman's position for the sake of satisfying a section of the policing community that has not always brought credit on policing itself. The police ombudsman must be free to bring together the best possible team. He or she must decide the manner of appointment and make the selection.

Clause 59, which concerns disciplinary matters, has caused concern. The present situation is absurd: if the Chief Constable decides not to bring disciplinary proceedings and is instructed by the commission to do so, he briefs the legal representatives who take the case to a tribunal, chaired by himself. He chairs the commission and almost has the power to decide whether to bring the case, and he briefs the legal representatives on the conduct of a case that he does not want to be brought. That absurdity should change and the Bill should not be silent on it.

The ombudsman should become the disciplinary prosecuting authority in the cases that are investigated on his behalf and there should be a fully independent tribunal to adjudicate on the merits of each case as well as to lay down penalties for those who are found guilty. That is the way round the absurdity, which must be dealt with in the Bill if that inherent weakness is not to continue to provide problems in the operations of the ombudsman's office.

The fact that police complaints are subject to the criminal standard of proof has been engaging minds here as well as in Northern Ireland. We should change to the civil standard: beyond reasonable doubt is inappropriate and applies to no element of the public service other than policing. That creates a remarkable gap in the implementation of police complaints.

I know that the Home Affairs Committee is considering the matter in England and Wales and that the civil standard already applies in Scotland, which sets the United Kingdom precedent. What is wrong with following the Scottish precedent in relation to the standard of proof, when in effect we are following it in relation to the oath or affirmation? The Minister should address that matter quickly.

There are some more absences that weaken the Bill considerably. All of us who have experience in the north of Ireland know that many police officers against whom complaints are made take early retirement and that there drops the complaint. That way around the problem should be blocked, because once the ombudsman is involved in an investigation he should bring it to a conclusion, if only to protect the integrity of his office and of the police officer concerned if the case is not proven.

There should be a formal pronouncement by the ombudsman when wrong has been done but cannot be proved. It is not enough to leave the matter hanging in the air, with suspicion lurking about. A formal pronouncement would at least be an honest position to present to the community, rather than simply letting the matter fester and boil over.

Reference has been made to reimbursement when complaints are proven. The Bill should go further than that and provide for compensation, because that would strengthen the power of decision on complaints and prevent the type of difficulty that has occurred with civil cases being brought on the foot of frivolous complaints that may be sustained in courts of law but would not be sustained through reference to the ombudsman's office.

Those points are crucial. I would like to have been much more complimentary to the Bill.

Mr. Ingram *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mallon: I note the Minister's reaction. I have been trying to deal with the problem of policing in Northern Ireland for longer than I care to remember. We will certainly not solve it unless we recognise that there is a problem. I am terribly sorry if the Minister's feelings are hurt. That was not my intention; I simply want to put honestly on record my position on the Bill.

I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will allow me to reply to a comment made about my colleague, Mark Durkan, in Derry. No one knows the problems of policing in Derry better than he does, and no one tried harder in the weeks before last weekend to negotiate a resolution. He is a man of integrity whose criticism was of faulty policing strategy, which is an entirely different matter from in any way condoning the violence.

6.18 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) regretted any hurt that he might have inflicted on the Minister in respect of the Bill. I will have no such reservations, because it is the most ill-conceived and badly drafted Bill that I have seen in almost 15 years in the House. For sheer effrontery, it ranks a close second to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and it smacks of thinking and planning that fall not far short of treachery.

The Secretary of State and the Minister constantly harp on about a more efficient and acceptable Royal Ulster Constabulary. No one would gainsay them as regards an improvement in the service the RUC brings to society in Northern Ireland, but I have not heard in that phraseology any plain and unequivocal recognition of the level of protection that the RUC has provided in the most difficult circumstances during 27 horrible and bitter years, or any acknowledgement of the RUC's detection levels, arrests and successful prosecutions for crimes committed against society. It would help a great deal if the Minister would acknowledge that, under the most difficult circumstances—I emphasise that—the RUC has a record that is unsurpassed by any other United Kingdom constabulary. Furthermore, it would be helpful if the Minister would acknowledge that no other police force in the civilised, western world has a better record than the RUC, under the most difficult circumstances for the past 27 years.

We have all seen images on television of the mentally disturbed indigent outside the gates of the White House, who was causing some problems and waving a knife. We saw the reaction of the Washington police who, although they had him totally surrounded, gunned him down in cold blood. That sort of behaviour would never be accepted from the RUC.

In another incident in the United States, someone drove off in a tank, eventually marooning it on the motorway, jammed in the middle reservation. That tank was going nowhere. A policeman climbed on top, opened the hatch, reached down with his pistol and shot the driver through the top of the head. That would not be acceptable either and it is not the standard set by the RUC. So, when using careless words about the police in Northern Ireland the Minister and others would do well to think carefully about what the police there have had to endure and how they have endured it in the past 27 years.

The Government inherited this Bill, but that is no excuse for promoting such flawed draft legislation. Whether the previous Government would have rushed to the House with such dangerous nonsense is immaterial and it is a question to which we will never know the answer. This Government are now responsible.

On Second Reading, I cannot hope to expand on all the dangers inherent in the Bill. I look for reassurance that a great deal of time will be made available in Committee. The Ulster Unionists envisage that a large number of amendments will be required. We would prefer to consider the Bill in Committee at a reasonable hour, rather than finding ourselves up against the problems that we had with the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

Furthermore, it is not helpful when Northern Ireland Office civil servants, diplomatic staff in the United States and, perhaps, even the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland assume that this Bill is already enshrined in law. I must draw the attention of the House to the right hon. Lady's performance when she mentioned her key objectives and performance indicators for the RUC, despite the fact that the exercise simply reproduced the methodology that the RUC had long employed. One has only to read the Chief Constables' annual reports for perhaps the past 15 years or longer to discover that.

Noticeably, the name Royal Ulster Constabulary was seldom mentioned and the new and unacceptable police service for Northern Ireland terminology was noted by the journalists to whom the Secretary of State made her

[Mr. Ken Maginnis]

presentation. Let the right hon. Lady not deny that the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is to be relegated if she gets her way.

An official briefing, which emanated from our Washington embassy on 8 December, alludes to

"A further step which should help to build confidence in Northern Ireland was the publication on 5 December of a Police Bill which will inter alia create a Police Ombudsman able to investigate complaints against the police independently; abolish the RUC oath of allegiance to the Queen;"—

note the language—

"and introduce the concept of a Northern Ireland Police Service, incorporating the RUC and others involved in law enforcement."

Mr. Godman: As a Scotsman, I have never yet heard a Scottish police officer complaining about the oath that he or she takes when taking up the position of a police constable. In all seriousness—I am not being facetious—does the hon. Gentleman not regard the title, Royal Ulster Constabulary, as a little antiquated?

Mr. Maginnis: To answer the last question first and briefly, no. On the more substantive point, my party has no difficulty with the oath as far as it is proposed. We have seen changes to the oath. I will deal at greater length with that matter as I proceed, but what scares many law-abiding people—specifically, members of the Unionist tradition in Northern Ireland—is the reasoning behind what is happening. I will allow the hon. Gentleman to have a copy of the document. I am sure that it is in the public domain as it was issued by the British embassy in Washington. He will discover that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the welfare of society in Northern Ireland, but alludes more specifically to how the republicans' appetite for change can be fulfilled—how they can be pleased by the apparent weakness of government in the face of militant republicanism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if a person lives in a part of the United Kingdom where his or her place within it is absolutely certain, such as Cornwall or Devon, symbols are not, perhaps, so important, but if a person lives in a part of the United Kingdom that is constantly under threat, along with one's identity, symbols take on a significance that they would not otherwise bear?

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that I agree whole-heartedly with what he says. Furthermore, when one's right to walk in certain parts of the United Kingdom is dictated by militant republicanism, one understands the fear that pervades the Unionist tradition.

As well as relegating the name of the RUC to be merely an element of a Northern Ireland police service, can the Minister tell us who "others" are? To be blunt, why should I believe that this does not allude to local policing on the basis of incorporating the very same people who currently and illegally impose their will on the civilian population of Northern Ireland? If the Bill had meant to include traffic wardens and civil servants employed in the Police Authority, no doubt it would have said so, but it leaves the option open. Will the Minister tell me when the IRA is to be recruited in areas that it at present terrorises? Is that process de facto already under way?

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said that when the IRA Army Council member Gerry Adams and his acolytes returned from Downing street to Aldergrove last Thursday, they were met by a band of 15 thugs who acted as a policing element, and were allowed to do so within the confines of the airport. They had, as far as I understand, certain communication facilities in their possession. Can the Minister tell me whether they were armed? Is it true that these same people have requested electronic entry facilities to the airport similar to those used by the RUC, who go there to meet the Minister and his ministerial colleagues?

In Northern Ireland, the RUC has policed with the consent of the overwhelming majority of the people for the past 75 years. Anecdotal experience of how they are treated on the streets and rural byways bears this out. All the surveys of public opinion carried out independently on behalf of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland show this support quite clearly. As the chairman of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland, Leslie Rodgers, said recently:

"that consent for the police is only a crudely assessed majority feeling; it is never unanimously given by all sections of the community. Those who withhold their consent range from disaffected drop-outs, to young people simply going through a rebellious phase to irreformable criminals and terrorists and those who support them. The consent of this latter group to policing is not only unwinnable but irrelevant in the context of striving to meet the needs of the wider public."

Does the Minister disagree with that assessment? Does he not recognise that the greater number of people within both traditions co-operate with the RUC and depend on it when carrying out their duties? The Royal Ulster Constabulary is unique. It is the question mark over its very existence that causes dismay, disappointment and, most of all, anger among members of the RUC and their families.

The RUC is criticised because it holds on to its traditional symbols: the badge, the royal prefix, the allegiance to the Crown, the flying of the Union flag on preordained days on public buildings such as police stations, but all of these are what makes the RUC a British police service, not the French gendarmerie, the German Polizei or the Spanish civil guard. It is what gives a disciplined force its esprit de corps, its sense of identity and comradeship which has enabled it to endure and survive the loss of 301 officers in the line of duty during the past 27 years, and almost 8,000 injured in an unflinching determination to protect the community.

If anyone is in doubt as to the importance of a symbol to those who risk their lives, let them take note of the row created on armistice Sunday, in London, by the insult that was felt by the veterans because the Union flag was flown upside down and was tattered.

I do not believe that the official trappings of the RUC give offence to anyone other than those who seek to be offended. Their campaign is to create not a neutral working environment but a neutered RUC, bereft of identity and effectiveness from a lack of self-confidence.

I quote again Leslie Rodgers, who said:

"The effect of all this one-sided criticism of the Force is to leave members with an impending sense of betrayal"—

which is shared by members of my party—

"that the RUC may be sacrificed for political expediency rather than recognised as the brave and disciplined service which holds this community"

in Northern Ireland

"together when civil violence and terrorism threaten disintegration."

I listened carefully to the very constructive speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, and I understand—as my party tries to understand—the points that he puts across on behalf of his party, but there is a fundamental flaw in everything that I heard from him this evening: he sees policing not as something that serves society but as something that satisfies political expediencies that exist between and among the traditions in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: I regret that the hon. Gentleman has formed that opinion. I was at great pains to point out that I want to see support for policing. I do not want it in a verbal sense. I said what it meant—joining the police service; defending it; defending it within one's own community; but to do that there have to be fundamental changes, which are tied to the political dilemma of the north of Ireland. Without those changes we will not get there.

Mr. Maginnis: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not want to enter into a narrow debate with him at this stage. I think that we shall have an opportunity in Committee to sort out what he meant, and how we can consider the interests of society rather than what I interpret as a need to fulfil the specific political aspiration of one tradition in Northern Ireland.

Leslie Rodgers said:

"But the RUC is not a spent force to be cast aside like some unwanted or unfashionable ideal. It is young, progressive and ultimately successful and its officers recognise more than most the changing realities of life on and off the street.

The people of Northern Ireland need the RUC. Its future role and strength should not be diluted until the future of Northern Ireland . . . has been democratically decided."

I echo those words. Anything less is weakness, and will be exploited by the terrorists and their co-travellers as the sign of a Government prepared to compromise on the rule of law. If the change of image and name of the RUC is not designed solely to placate the insatiable appetite of militant republicanism, which will further subvert the civil rights of the law-abiding members of both traditions in Northern Ireland, why is it happening at all?

Those are questions that the Minister must answer. He must tell us what was intended by Mr. Carey's bulletin from the embassy in Washington. He must tell us what the Secretary of State is about when she devotes the greater part of her time to what she calls her de-escalation policy, or her information action plan—something that is designed exclusively to deal with attitudes emanating from republicanism—and how those matters will be dealt with. It was an offence to everyone in Northern Ireland with any sense of decency or propriety to find that the Secretary of State was considering writing in "An Phoblacht", the IRA's magazine.

Mr. Ingram: She is not.

Mr. Maginnis: I am sorry; the hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Mr. Ingram: Can the hon. Gentleman please quote from whatever document says that the Secretary of State was considering writing in the publication that he mentions?

Mr. Maginnis: The Minister, the Secretary of State and a great many civil servants in Northern Ireland would very much like me to identify the document to which I allude, but I have no intention of doing so, because I believe that I, as an elected representative—

Mr. Ingram *rose*—

Mr. Maginnis: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Ingram: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State's integrity has been maligned by an hon. Member who has said that she was considering doing something—a claim that he is not now prepared to justify. I do not know whether it is in your domain to rule on that, but, if so, I would welcome your comments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) is responsible for his own speech and his own words.

Mr. Mallon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have heard a direct attack on the personal integrity of the Secretary of State. Is it right for the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) to refer to a document, shuffle papers as though that document were in his possession and then refuse to make it available to the House? Is that not an attack on the Secretary of State, and should she not be defended by all hon. Members who are present?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What I can say is that the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone has been in order. It is my responsibility to ensure that every hon. Member is in order, and the hon. Gentleman is in order. It is best, perhaps, not to talk about personalities, but to debate the issue that is before us.

Mr. Maginnis: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to suggest to those who question what I am saying that when one is in a hole one should stop digging. When the Secretary of State and I met to discuss the issue last Wednesday or Thursday, she did not deny that she was contemplating writing for "An Phoblacht". She may not do so now, but she indicated to me that as a member of Her Majesty's Opposition she had already written for the publication once.

[Mr. Maginnis]

Let us bear in mind the nature of that publication. It glories in the death of members of Her Majesty's services and of members of the RUC. It is folly that the Secretary of State should have considered writing for it, or sought advice on a possible press facility.

Mr. Ingram: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maginnis: No, I will not give way again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should be seated while I am on my feet.

The House is discussing a specific matter—a Northern Ireland Bill. Perhaps we should leave the matters that the hon. Gentleman has been raising, and stick to the subject of the Bill. I think that that would be helpful.

Mr. Maginnis: I will move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can see that I have embarrassed the Government considerably. I will not expand on the matter, or on other matters contained in the document; I will simply say that the Government's judgment and intention in respect of what is happening in Northern Ireland, specifically in connection with the police, give huge grounds for disquiet, and that we are bound to question the judgment of those who think in such a way.

Let me now deal with matters relating to the police complaints commission, and the proposal to appoint a police ombudsman to replace it. My party, too, is grateful to Dr. Maurice Hayes for his report, and, in general, sees the good sense of his suggestions. I will leave any minor amendments to this part of the Bill until the Committee stage, but perhaps I could take up—in a supportive manner—the point made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, who objected to the way in which the ombudsman was to be appointed. I agree with him that the Secretary of State should not be solely responsible for the appointment, although I think that his ideas on the period involved should be considered much more carefully. We go part of the way towards agreement on the issue.

On the matter of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, treachery is undoubtedly afoot. When the authority was established in 1970, it was believed that it would insulate the RUC from any interference by politicians, and that even the suggestion of tampering with the RUC's operations would be resisted. The Bill is a veritable reversal of the authority's role, because its responsibility is to be eroded. I predict that the authority will no longer attract people of principle or ability, and will become merely a whingeing shop for malcontents and agitators who have no real interest in the security and welfare of society. I am not referring to the members of the authority: the whingers will be those who go to the authority when it has no real power.

The authority will have no power to influence and protect the RUC on a day-to-day basis. The Minister will probably say that the authority's involvement in the consultation process is no mean responsibility, but those of us who have tried to sustain Northern Ireland affairs at local government level know that consultation is meaningless when it comes to planning, roads, education, health and a host of other matters, so why should it be any different for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland?

The authority is currently involved in day-to-day policing. A sum of money is allocated by Government to the authority, 86 per cent. of which is allocated by the authority to the Chief Constable to pay for day-to-day policing. My percentages may not be exactly right, but about 14 per cent. of that money remains with the authority and is spent on new build, strengthening police stations, repairs and the purchase of equipment. Those tasks give the authority on-going, day-to-day contact with the police and with policing at the coal face, so it never loses touch with the grassroots.

It is now proposed that that 14 per cent. should be moved across to the Chief Constable. He is already in charge of 13,500 men, which is a fairly demanding task operationally, and now he is to be given a new kingdom over which to reign. He will be given a civilian civil servant, who will probably have the rank of assistant chief constable, and below him will be a pyramid of people to whom he will relate directly and for whom he will be responsible. He will have to account to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland for his policing money: the 86 per cent. The able and dedicated people from both traditions who currently serve on the authority will feel insulted, because it will be relegated to no more than a consultative body. They will not stay, and will be replaced by less able people who have less day-to-day contact with people at the coal face. Accountability will be called into question.

Knowing my feelings about this issue, the previous Government invited me to Stormont for a presentation, which explained why 14 per cent. of the money that is now administered by the Police Authority should be handed over to the Chief Constable and a new kingdom created. I listened carefully, and I asked whether they could produce figures to show that there would be a financial benefit, because I saw no benefit to the community. The Police Authority was established as a representative body in the community to provide an interface between the ordinary members of society and the police and insulation between the politicians and the police.

Those figures were not forthcoming. I asked for them again and again, but I have never seen them. In the past 72 hours, someone has produced out of a hat a figure of £10 million. It is amazing that we get such nice round figures as £10 million. It is not £7.26 million or £11.19 million, but the nice round figure of £10 million. I am expected to be satisfied with that. Let me tell the Minister that I am not satisfied, and furthermore I do not believe that the information can be verified. If it could be verified, it would have been given much sooner.

This exercise has to do with where power over the Chief Constable and his police force in Northern Ireland actually rests. The police will no longer be insulated, and we should remember that if our talks progress successfully, there could be devolved government in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh or the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone may be in charge of policing in the future. *[Interruption.]* I note the enthusiasm with which that idea is received.

Clauses 4, 5 and 21 refer to the responsibilities with which the Police Authority is charged. They use such terms as

"as the Secretary of State may direct"

or

"the decision of the Secretary of State".

The least offensive is

"with the approval of the Secretary of State",

although I am sure that it has exactly the same meaning. The Secretary of State will have total power. She will not have to deal with the body of people that has existed for the past 27 years: she will have to deal only with the Chief Constable, who is directly dependent on her for the money that he requires to fulfil his policing role. She may say, "Chief Constable Bloggs, you will get a £50 million cut unless I see this or that." What is the Chief Constable likely to do? He is likely to say, "Thank you very much Secretary of State. I will do what you want. Please hand over the lolly." That is the reality of the Government taking total control.

We should look carefully at the role of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland in relation to the Chief Constable. Clause 21(3)(b) states that the authority

"shall, if required by the Secretary of State, call upon the Chief Constable so to retire."

That is another responsibility to be taken away from the Police Authority. In Committee we must ensure—

Mr. Ingram: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that what he has read out about what he calls the overriding power of the Secretary of State is not a change from the existing legislation? There is nothing new in it.

Mr. Maginnis: A great deal is new. Obviously, the Minister has not been listening. Did he not hear that the Secretary of State has placed the entire budget under the control of the Chief Constable? I do not know whether the saying exists in Scotland but where I come from people say, "He who pays the piper calls the tune." That does not always protect society and it is society that we should be considering, not the finer feelings of the Secretary of State or those of her Ministers. The Minister is forthcoming with information. What has he done with the community police liaison committees? Where have they gone? I note that what remains of the Police Authority will liaise at district council level.

For some years many of us have worked hard to establish the credibility of community police liaison committees which work at local level and feed their information through to the Police Authority. That is done in a balanced, mainly non-political way and that is quite difficult in Northern Ireland. Those committees are not mentioned in the Bill. Another layer of protection for society and for the Royal Ulster Constabulary is to be removed. No doubt in his winding-up speech the Minister will give us some idea of the role that community police liaison committees will have to play. Will it be meaningful?

As the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) said in an intervention, in normal circumstances the oath would not have the same significance as it has in Northern Ireland. We are told that because it is an oath to the Queen it is unacceptable to some members of one tradition in Northern Ireland. I think we all recognise that the oath to the Queen shows loyalty to the state: the constitution. In relation to policing, that oath of loyalty is towards those subjects who seek the maintenance of their freedom, civil rights and security and protection against crime and subversion. It is directed at those who want their wishes, which were democratically expressed at the ballot box, protected within the state process. It means nothing more and nothing less.

I have been associated with policing since 1959 and none of those many members of the Roman Catholic tradition who serve faithfully within Northern Ireland has said to me that he was in any way inhibited by having his duties defined by the present oath. I am more worried about the definition of a constable's duties. The oath states that an officer shall carry out his duties as a constable. Those duties are set out in clause 18 and they contain the vaguest of vague expressions such as "to preserve order". Does that mean that if a big bully attacks a little fellow, the constable sides with the bully even if the little fellow is right, because that preserves order?

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that is a narrow interpretation of what is intended? Although it is possible to interpret it in that way, it is extremely unlikely that that is the true purpose of that part of the Bill.

Mr. Maginnis: I am a member of an Opposition party and I am not sure what the Government have in mind. In setting out a constable's duties, particularly in the Northern Ireland context, there should be specific mention of the prevention of subversion and the maintenance of civil rights. There is nothing like that. Therefore, the setting out of the duties is inadequate. Perhaps it is a small fault and the Government will be able to amend and strengthen the clause to meet Northern Ireland's needs.

I was earlier accused of calling the Secretary of State's integrity into question. I have never suggested that the Secretary of State is malicious or is lacking in judgment, nor have I suggested that she is personally treacherous. However, those who through naivety or malice or for other reasons betray society in Northern Ireland, and those who betray the RUC, which has stood between the ordinary members of society and the terrorist for the past 27 years and longer, are guilty of treachery.

One must wonder at the judgment emanating from the Northern Ireland Office—let me deal with it collectively, so that no one will feel left out. When we see a member of the Northern Ireland Office team going to the United States and liaising with the lawyers representing Kevin Barry Artt, an escapee from the Maze, about what will happen if he is extradited, and making promises about how long he may have to serve if he is extradited, we must question whether a member of the Northern Ireland Office team is overstepping the mark and interfering in the judicial process.

Mr. Ingram: It may be useful if the hon. Gentleman would explain whether he is speaking about a member of the ministerial team or a civil servant. If he is referring to a civil servant, does he not understand that civil servants cannot answer such accusations? Will he therefore direct his accusations to Ministers?

Mr. Maginnis: Civil servants going to the United States with a Secretary of State or a Minister do not act independently when they go to consult the lawyers of an escapee from the Maze prison. They act under the aegis and direction of that Secretary of State or that Minister. I am suggesting that in doing so in this case, they stepped over the mark and into a judicial area where they have no competence.

[Mr. Maginnis]

That makes me wonder whether the same Secretary of State or Ministers are interfering and giving assurances that they are not mandated to give in respect of extradition cases between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, and whether they have considered what effect that might have on the good relationship that exists between the RUC and the Garda Siochana.

I could rehearse these follies until the hour of midnight, if that were permitted. I do not intend to do so—*[Interruption.]* I can see the disappointment on the faces of Ministers. The judgment exhibited through the Bill is symptomatic of the judgment, or lack of it, that I have seen during the incidents to which I referred. I leave the Minister with that thought, and I hope that he can give us a satisfactory answer and an assurance that we will have—I repeat the request—adequate time in Committee to amend a Bill that would be a disaster for the RUC.

7.13 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): The view that I shall advance in relation to the Bill broadly reflects that of the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay): I do not oppose the general thrust of the Bill, although there are matters about which I am not particularly happy. It is rather like the curate's egg—good in parts.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) referred to some fundamental concept of policing which the Bill did not address. I was interested in the concept that he was adumbrating, although it was never presented in a specific and clear way that I could entirely appreciate.

The Bill deals with a limited range of matters—the reorganisation of the administration of policing in Northern Ireland, the important issue of the independent adjudication of complaints made against the police, and the form of oath, to which I shall return. There is also the element of the name of the RUC, and the question whether that honourable title, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, is in the process of being subsumed into some other, more nebulous entity—the police service for Northern Ireland.

It may be helpful to hon. Members who are not as intimately associated with Northern Ireland as those who have spent their lives there if I deal with the nature of the RUC, its origin and its purposes.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary has been rightly described by almost every speaker in the debate as having a very proud record. We have heard about the 301 members who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of Northern Ireland, and about the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who have been injured and mutilated in the course of their service. We have heard that the entire membership of the RUC live constantly in circumstances where they are under threat of death or injury. That is a daily condition of life to which they must become inured.

Nevertheless, there seems to be inherent in the Bill the suggestion that the RUC has in some way been less than pure in its service to Northern Ireland. There seems to be an assumption that, in some way, the force has been sectarian, and that it has been guilty of conduct that makes it unworthy of the backing of the entire community. Indeed, it is a matter of public record that the Social Democratic and Labour party, as well as Sinn Fein, has withheld its support from the RUC.

One must look at the fundamental functions of the RUC since its inception in 1922. It was the successor to the Royal Irish Constabulary. The figure mentioned by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, of 21 or 22 per cent. Catholics in the RUC in 1922, reflects the fact that many of them transferred at that date from the Royal Irish Constabulary, which was an all-Ireland police force and a mixed force.

Let us not forget that, in the whole of Ireland, members of that force, which had a far greater percentage of Catholics in it than the 21 per cent. in Ulster—possibly as high as 50 or 60 per cent.—were the subject of assassination and murder before 1921. At the very beginning of the so-called armed struggle in 1916, some of the heroes of the old IRA, such as Dan Breen and Sean Tracey, were responsible for the murder of a Catholic policeman at Solihedbeg. There is a tradition of violent Sinn Fein-IRA terrorists directing their terrorism at the forces of law and order, regardless of how those forces are composed.

When the state of Northern Ireland was created in the early 1920s, there was a political question of allegiance. There were those who were determined to bring down the state, and there were those who never recognised the state. There are people today—constitutional politicians—who are subliminally of that mind.

I have the greatest personal respect and regard for the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, but he never refers to Northern Ireland—he refers to the north of Ireland. There is subliminally within his language a rejection of the state of Northern Ireland. That is perfectly legitimate. He is opposed to the state, but as a democrat he will try to change it through democratic means, and I respect him for that.

However, there is an armed tradition in Ireland, and in Northern Ireland, that has never accepted the constitutional restraints that the hon. Gentleman observes. Since the inception of the state, that armed tradition has been determined to do everything in its power, by violent means, to bring the state to an end.

As a result, from the date of its creation the RUC essentially has had two functions. Its primary function, which it shares with every other police force not only in the United Kingdom but throughout the world, is the preservation of what we might call ordinary law and order. It has to deal with the tracing and identification of criminal behaviour and bring those responsible for a whole range of crimes—from murder to felony to misdemeanour—before the courts. It has to ensure that the rule of law is observed.

As the Bill recognises, the RUC is responsible for the preservation and protection of life and property, the preservation of order, the prevention of offences and, where an offence has been committed, taking measures to bring the offenders to justice. Those are all part of the functions of the RUC in its normal phase of ensuring that the community is kept safe. After having been involved in the law for almost 30 years, it is my experience that in that function, the RUC has never been significantly the subject of complaint about its independence, its integrity or its objectivity in carrying out its duties. Nor, indeed, has the Northern Ireland judiciary been the subject of complaint in those functions.

The other function, with which both the RUC and the judiciary have had to deal since the commencement of the state, has been the bringing to justice of those

who violently objected to the existence of the state, and who were prepared, by gun and bomb, to ensure that their political objectives were attained. The history of the state since 1921 has been one of continuing war, with people prepared to use violent means to change the constitution of the state against the will of the majority of the people who reside in that part of the United Kingdom.

The RUC has had a dual function—in one it was perfectly acceptable, but in the other it was constantly the subject of political attack as unfair and biased. No one stopped to inquire how senior police officers and constables on the beat could be fair, objective and equitable when dealing with minor crime, but suddenly became biased monsters when they were called upon to deal with politically motivated violent crime.

Judges who sat in court dealing with divorces, civil claims for serious injuries, property disputes and so on, were never the subject of complaint—indeed, they enjoyed the highest reputation—but suddenly, when called upon to adjudicate in cases that involved those who had committed violent crimes for political purposes, they became biased, unfair, discriminatory and sectarian. That is the basis of the difficulties with the RUC.

It is a difficult problem, but the truth is that the vast majority of the community in Northern Ireland would give both the judiciary and the RUC their confidence and trust if they were permitted to do so. However, the criminal political element will not permit ordinary people to display their confidence in the RUC. One reason why political terrorism has enjoyed success beyond its numbers in Northern Ireland is the political control that terrorists have managed to achieve over a large section of the community, especially those living in the huge, modern, public housing estates that were created in the 1960s.

The terrorists mark out their territory in those areas. The footpaths are red, white and blue, or green, white and gold. The insignia and motifs on the gable walls eulogise either the South Armagh brigade of the IRA, the 5th battalion of the Ulster Volunteer Force or the Ulster Freedom Fighters. The terrorists mark out their territories, and they control them. The vast majority of the people in those areas would give their whole-hearted confidence to the RUC if they were allowed to do so, but they are not.

Although Northern Ireland legislation, including this Bill, contains solid material and points of organisation and change that need to be made, there is a suspicion in Northern Ireland that the changes proposed in this Bill, in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill and in the Public Processions etc. (Northern Ireland) Bill, which is to be dealt with in the House on Thursday, are all designed indirectly to comfort terrorism. The suggested name change for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland serves as an example.

Clause 2 is very strange, because—to put it bluntly—it does not seem to make a great deal of sense. It states:

"(1) The police authority shall secure the maintenance of the police force in Northern Ireland which shall continue to consist of—

(a) the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and

(b) the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve.

(2) The police force, traffic wardens and civilian staff of the Police Authority shall form a single service which shall be known as the Northern Ireland Police Service."

That seems to be introducing a name change by the back door.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary is the effective police force controlling and enforcing law and order in Northern Ireland. What will happen if we suddenly tack on to the force wardens and civilian police staff—such as clerks, fitters, mechanics and others who service equipment—and they become the Northern Ireland police service? One wag suggested, rather cynically, that the only way of restoring order to Northern Ireland was to arm wardens. However, that suggestion was—I hope—only a jest.

As I said in an earlier intervention, symbols of the state and of identity—marks that show who we are as a people, and where we belong—are very often taken for granted where the substance of one's identity is established. People with an established identity do not really care very much whether one stands for the national anthem, or even whether the national anthem is played, because everyone knows that they belong.

There is no question of someone in Surrey or in Kent being emptied out of the United Kingdom. Therefore, symbols in those areas perhaps do not matter so much. They can have 20 ethnic Irish pubs instead of the Rose and Crown and engage in all types of activities other than Morris dancing, and it will not matter a hoot. They know who they are, what their citizenship is and where they and their children will remain.

Now consider a situation in which one feels that one's identity and citizenship are constantly under threat, and that legislation and the direction of policy are always pointing one in the direction of another state, with which one does not identify and to which one does not wish to belong. Suddenly, symbols of one's identity—the Crown, the Queen and the royal appellation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary—become important.

The symbols become even more important when one reads the policy documents of the Government of the day. The document of 18 September 1988—which was signed by, among others, the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—stated that the Government's aim is a united Ireland, and that the goal will be achieved by a process of harmonisation. Among the harmonising factors is the gradual removal of the badges of identity of the British citizenry of Northern Ireland. Therefore, such matters—which cause the average Scotsman, Englishman or Welshman to ask, "Why are these people getting up tight?"—are important to some people.

We have an oath in which allegiance is sworn to the Queen. I have absolutely no objection to amending the current oath, and think that we need to obtain from new recruits only the necessary undertakings when they assume the rank of constable. However, the oath's new form—which I believe is directed only towards making the minority community feel good—will remove another badge or symbol of the majority community's British identity. The relentless process of attrition in removing their identity as British citizens causes their objection.

People say, "You've become paranoid; it's all in your imagination." I do not lay all my concerns at the door of the current Government, because the previous Government have questions to answer, too. In all the pages of the Downing street joint declaration of 15 December 1993, the majority in Northern Ireland are never described as British citizens. They are described as the "people of the north of Ireland" or as those of "one of the traditions of Northern Ireland". Never, ever are they described as British citizens. My worry about the beginning of change in the

[Mr. Robert McCartney]

description of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and in the form of the oath is based on my reservations about such matters.

Mr. Öpik: The hon. and learned Gentleman cited Wales and Scotland as examples within the Union. Does he agree that expressions of cultural identity in a different manner could not only create greater stability in the Union but reduce some of the cultural frictions that sometimes obstruct effective progress of the United Kingdom as four states, rather than as one pseudo-English super-state?

Mr. McCartney: I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point. The concept of citizenship rather than that of national identity—whether it be Scots, northern Irish, Welsh or English—is important. Citizenship, however, is the very thing that is being removed from the majority in Northern Ireland. Their sense of British citizenship is being removed. As I understand it, that citizenship is an over-arching concept that is recognised by all the disparate parts comprising the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, ultimately, symbols of identity—the phrase that he used—and a sense of citizenship are inseparable; that, without them and the sense of belonging to something or of being something, citizenship becomes ever less significant; and that citizenship ceases to have real weight and meaning once it becomes insignificant?

Mr. McCartney: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. Symbols are the badges of who we are. They are created over centuries by shared experiences in peace and in war, and by our culture, our history and our games. All those factors and all the differences are manifested in Northern Ireland.

It is, however, foolish to believe that altering the oath will attract into the RUC more members of the minority community. It is fatuous nonsense to suggest otherwise. The RUC has a low intake from the minority community, because people from that community fear that they will be subject to the risk of death, mutilation or ostracism by the community in which they live if they join the RUC. They believe that they will have to tear themselves from their community and move to an area that is safe for those in the RUC.

I am not certain that the Bill, in either its timing or its purpose, is essentially aimed at improving the policing of Northern Ireland, but I think it owes a great deal to a process of conciliation and concession to IRA terrorism. There is a strong argument that legislation such as this is part, as it were, of the continuing peace process, and that the process itself is primarily directed not at a democratic settlement in Northern Ireland but at the resolution of the continuing conflict between the British state and Sinn Fein-IRA.

Mr. Godman: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way, and showing me his characteristic courtesy. I must point out that, if I thought for a second that the Bill had been drafted and crafted in order to offer concessions to vicious and violent terrorists, I would vote against it.

Mr. McCartney: I accept that assurance without a second's hesitation. It is not so much that the Bill itself is directed solely at that purpose, as that it is part of the so-called policy of salami slicing, making a little concession here and there. What is the doggerel—a concession a day keeps the terrorist away?

The offer is that yes, we are going to make big changes, change the police and get to work on taking the word "Royal" out of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and making it a Northern Ireland police service, but the majority fear, with reason, that this is only the beginning, and that, further down the line, there may well be community policing.

What is community policing? We want to get everyone supporting the police, but not everyone will support a single police force, no matter how the notion is dressed up. So the next suggestion is that there can be a community police force that will reflect the feelings of the people in the area. There could be a community police force for Newry and Armagh, for Crossmaglen, for Mid-Tyrone or for the Fermanagh borders, all of which would have a certain resonance with the majority in the area. Those forces would perhaps take a more benign view of certain political terrorist activity. Where would they come from? Who would the members be?

Mr. Adams, recently received at No. 10 Downing street, struts about with one of his protectors, a Mr. Cleeky Clark. Clark was among those who were on the roof with a starting handle, attempting to get into the car occupied by two soldiers who were subsequently torn apart and brutally murdered in Casement park. Mr. Clark has a very long record, but he is now walking about as one of Mr. Adams's minders. Is he the sort of person who could conceivably be a member of the community police force in west Belfast? I just do not know.

The fear is that, for the purpose of political settlement, there will be a drive towards a police force that is acceptable in terms of terrorist objectives, and not because it deals with rapists, murderers, con men, fraudsters, paedophiles or the whole range of criminals dealt with by ordinary policemen. The prime consideration is whether the force is acceptable in terms of political terrorist crime.

Perhaps we will hear from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh about the fundamental principles of change to which he broadly referred and which he does not find in the Bill but which he believes, if they were in the Bill, would be the answer to the problem of getting the entire community to support a single police force. Perhaps I can supply the answer: it would be a police force that took absolutely no view on overt terrorist crime. It would be absolutely neutral in that respect.

However, while there is a police force that preserves the rule of law and deals with violent terrorists, whether they be orange or green, for there is absolutely no difference between those terrorists, those who employ violence for the purpose of achieving a political objective should be dealt with rigorously, whatever their objective.

It is interesting—my experience of the law bears this out—that the same complaints about the police are made by the same people in both communities. The so-called loyalist terrorists have become mirror images of their Sinn Fein-IRA opponents. On both sides, they do exactly the same thing: they enforce their control and political objectives with the same ruthless, brutal callousness. They subject the people under their control to the same intimidation, and are engaged in the same activities—extortion, intimidation, protection rackets, the sale of

stolen goods and the production of pirate videos. They subject both communities to a reign of terror in the name of political change.

There is a great fear in the entire community that the Government, in their efforts to resolve their conflict with such people, find it necessary to make concessions to their political representatives. We then get to this stage: although large parts of the Bill are worthy and excellent, and are, I believe, directed to proper change, there is nevertheless, tucked away here and there in the Bill, a small and sometimes even subliminal present for the men of terror.

Mr. Mallon: I would not have tried to intervene had not the hon. and learned Gentleman referred to me directly. I made no reference to principles, as *Hansard* will show. I said that there was a fundamental problem. Irrespective of how we view the matter, there is in effect a divided society—one section sees policing as its preserve, and another sees itself as without responsibility in relation to policing. Unless we try to deal with that fundamental problem, we are not going to be able to solve either the central political problem or the policing problem.

I do not wish to go on for too long, but I have been seeking change for a long time, and it is offensive—I do not mean that literally, but the hon. and learned Gentleman knows what I do mean—to find that the proposals are being offered as concessions to a violent organisation rather than as a rational response to rational argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was a bit too long.

Mr. McCartney: I shall be brief, because I have spoken for longer than I intended.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh crystallises the problem, which is not about policing, but about political objectives. The Social Democratic and Labour party, which is a constitutional party, and the Irish Government—the Government of a democratic state—share a common objective with Sinn Fein-IRA. They have different ideas about how to achieve it, but their common objective is a united Ireland. Anyone who is in favour of a united Ireland cannot give their allegiance to Northern Ireland. That is why they call it the north of Ireland. Until those two issues of policing and political objectives are divorced, we shall never have a proper policing system in Northern Ireland.

7.50 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The Government have clearly cobbled the Bill together hastily. We all had a letter on 4 December from the Minister of State who opened the debate. At the end of that letter, he talked of the "weeks ahead" for discussions on the Bill between all the parties. Today is 15 December. Where are the weeks ahead? Representatives of my party have tried to see the Minister three times, but could not do so because he was very busy.

The Bill has been cobbled together because there is a great move on at certain talks that are taking place at Stormont. If we believe Bertie Ahern, they will take place in Dublin after Easter—after the celebrations of the 1916 rebellion, no doubt—and perhaps in London a bit earlier. There must be a push because of that.

The Secretary of State said in a press release on 4 December:

> "The RUC already gives Northern Ireland a highly professional and effective police service, but it can be better, and it must do still more to be seen as a police service for everyone."

At the end of the press release, she said:

> "The Bill does not preclude discussion of policing in the talks. Indeed, we have given the commitment that any agreement reached in talks on the issues covered in this Bill will be taken on board during the passage of the Bill".

Duly elected Members of the House will not be able to reach decisions, but that privilege will be granted to those sitting in another place, including the representative of the southern Government, with all his clout, and others who could not even be elected to the forum, but got in on the top-up system. The Bill could change while it is passing through the House. The House does not know what the Bill will be like.

As an elected representative in the House, I resent that. I thought that this was the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The people whom I represent resent it. They think that their elected representatives should have an opportunity to see the whole Bill.

The Bill has been cobbled together. The Government are trying to mask political changes to the police behind a reform of the police complaints system. I believe in the reform of that system. There are many good features in the Bill relating to the ombudsman. I resent the present system, which is not independent. I have always believed that the police should not be judge, jury and interrogator of complaints against them.

A certain police officer, whom I will not name in the House, got into serious difficulties with the Protestant population in part of my constituency. Many complaints were made against him. He was then promoted to become one of the chiefs of the disciplinary body that investigates such reports. Those who are responsible for discipline and complaints sent a letter to a constituent of mine who had made a complaint about him. My constituent was told to ring the headquarters in Limavady, where an officer would talk to him about making an appointment. When my constituent rang and asked for the officer who had been named in the letter, he was told, "He is no longer here." The officer mentioned his name. My constituent said, "I do not wish to talk to you," because he had been making a complaint against the officer.

That does not give me confidence in the police complaints system. We need an ombudsman. However, I want to know how he will be appointed and how independent he will be. He should not be just a political appointee of the Secretary of State. That is a matter to deal with in Committee.

We should have no doubt that this is a politically highly charged Bill. I have already mentioned the Secretary of State's comments. The RUC rank and file resent the slight on them. They have had to operate in the most difficult circumstances of civil disturbance and conflict. They have faced murder and mayhem. They have been intimidated and abused by those who did not like their behaviour in upholding law and order. They have been abused by the Dublin Government, who have made outrageous charges that they have not been able to prove. They have been insulted by ignorant European politicians. In another place, I have heard vicious, lying attacks on members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I have had to stand up in

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Strasbourg and defend the integrity of the RUC against people who did not know anything about the situation—they just thought that it was a good target to attack. The United States Government denied weapons to the Royal Ulster Constabulary on one occasion. It has been under attack from all around the world.

I have attended more police funerals than any other Member of Parliament. I have sat with widows and curly-haired little orphans. I have thought of the service that their fathers and husbands gave, and then I have thought of the vicious bigotry employed against the force in general.

Not all members of the RUC are perfect; indeed, not all Members of this House are perfect. But the RUC is second to no other force in its professionalism, fairness and impartiality. From time to time, people on both sides of the religious divide have criticised the RUC. I do not believe, however, that any other police force in Europe is more open or accountable. Yet the Secretary of State says—I agreed with the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) on this point—that the RUC must still do more.

I was glad that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), who has left us for a moment, made it clear that no more Roman Catholics would be joining the RUC just because the oath was done away with. The oath is not the problem. The problem is that nationalists will never be satisfied with the RUC. Republican nationalists and constitutional nationalists, the latter in the shape of the SDLP, are both determined that the only way to settle the matter is to deal with what has been called the fundamental difficulty. That fundamental difficulty concerns whether our police force upholds the legal status of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh told us that we need a police force that the entire community can support. There is of course no such police force in the world. I ask hon. Members to consider their own back yard. Criminal elements here do not give the police their entire support; nor do certain other elements in this country. The idea of a police force with the support of the entire community is nonsensical—it cannot be done.

The constitutional nationalist in this debate, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, welcomes a few parts of the Bill, but says that they do not really deal with the issue. That issue concerns whether one believes in Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom or in a united Ireland. SDLP Members say that they support the RUC, but when we ask them to call on their constituents to join it, they refuse. That is the crucial test. The nationalist community has driven a wedge between itself and the police. Nationalists have always objected to, and intimidated, members of the RUC, and those who have joined the RUC have had the flames of hatred fanned against them by the IRA.

Some people in the House do not really know what is happening. Many Roman Catholics have strong British Army connections—their families have been in the British Army for generations. In the Downpatrick area some years ago, three UDR personnel were murdered, one of them from a Roman Catholic family which had been connected with the British Army since the time of their great-grandfather. The local undertaker was visited by the IRA and told that he would never bury anyone again if he buried this particular young man. So the family had to go to an undertaker 20 miles away to have the burial done.

It is important to remember that no concession will satisfy these people. Consider the case of the Roman Catholic police sergeant shot at Warrenpoint. The IRA rifled the place where he was to be buried, and warned the undertaker that he would never bury anyone again if the sergeant was buried there. I attended the funeral, as the man was a constituent of mine. In the end, he had to be buried away in Banbridge.

Tonight, I salute the Roman Catholics who have joined the RUC and who have suffered for doing so. Because a young constituent of mine joined, he has been exiled—he cannot go home. His people have to travel about 100 miles if they want to spend a day with him. That is his punishment, the price he has paid. All this talk about offering concessions, and then more concessions, is fruitless. All will not be well. As we heard from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, such concessions will not make much difference. Indeed, he said that he was sorry that more progress was not being made.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down asked—he did not get an answer—what nationalism wants to do about the police. What are the nationalists' proposals? We should like to hear them.

This serious Bill is divided into three general areas. First comes the reform of the complaints mechanism, with which I largely agree. Then there is the structure of the RUC; its management and accountability are to be changed. There is also the claim that the Bill will make the RUC man on the beat more acceptable than he is today: it will not.

The Bill contains a number of political concessions. We were told that there would be no change in the RUC's name. Having been in the House a long time, I said, "Let's see the Bill before we pass judgment." Now that I have the Bill, I read clause 2:

"The Police Authority shall secure the maintenance of the police force in Northern Ireland".

We used to be told that it was a police service; now it has gone back to being a police force. "Police service" was the jargon with which we were all familiar. We used to talk about police barracks; now they are called police stations. All these changes were brought in by a Chief Constable who came over to Ulster at the beginning of the troubles saying that he could solve everything. He took down the shutters of the police stations. He said that he did not like leather belts, so he gave the men cloth belts. He said that he did not like boots, so he gave them shoes—the men were all spruced up. He did not like the collar of the uniform, so he changed it from black to a pale green.

Did that make any difference? Not a bit. The Chief Constable was sent home in the end. He got married and his wife came over and took him home like a child. What a fool he was—but the authorities backed him. I remember Ministers at the Dispatch Box praising him to the skies and saying that he had the answer to everything—

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Young.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, that was his name—but he is no longer young.

Clause 2 says that the police service

"shall continue to consist of—

(a) The Royal Ulster Constabulary; and

(b) The Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve.

(2) The police force, traffic wardens and the civilian staff of the Police Authority shall form a single service which shall be known as the Northern Ireland Police Service."

That is not the traditional name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It must have been written by a Jesuit. That is the only comment I can make because it is a most clever construction, especially the use of the word "single". The reference to "a single service" did not miss anything. The men and ladies who helped to draw up the Bill are here in the Box listening to the debate. They knew what they were doing and they did it well. In the next honours list they may have some letters added to their names for a good job well done, but they have not bluffed the ordinary people of Northern Ireland who know what it is all about and what they are after.

I do not understand why right hon. and hon. Members should worry about the oath, because we all have to take the oath. Even if we make wee statements at the Dispatch Box, we still have to take the oath. Although one hon. Member did not take the oath, but said something else, and another crossed his fingers, we all have to take the oath. A police officer who takes a vow will be just as much a target of the IRA as the man who took the oath. It will make no difference whatever, but at this crucial time it means a great deal to the people of Northern Ireland. They see it as another concession.

I was in the House after Drumcree when Ministers lashed out at the Orangemen. Like a certain Minister on the Front Bench, I am an ex-Orangeman and I heard what was said. Today, the Minister was not prepared to put the blame where it really belonged, but the time will come when we know exactly what took place to cause £5 million of damage to Londonderry.

I salute the people of Londonderry. It is a great city and I am well acquainted with it, as I represent it in another place, where, as everyone knows, I have a good personal relationship with the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). I have been received well by both communities in Londonderry. I regret what happened, but I denounce the fact that the Government did not react more strongly. They can indict Orangemen, so they could have indicted the people responsible for that atrocity and let them know that it was not acceptable and could not be reconciled with the Mitchell principles.

Mr. Godman: I hesitate to intervene, as I have never been an Orangeman.

Rev. Ian Paisley: We could remedy that.

Mr. Godman: The hon. Gentleman is well known as a fierce and formidable opponent of terrorism. Will he take this opportunity to denounce with equal fervour the recent activities of the Loyalist Volunteer Force?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am under threat from the volunteer force and from all the Protestant paramilitaries. I have had bullets fired through my bedroom window, not by the IRA, but by loyalist volunteers. No force, whether it is the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Loyalist Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association or anyone else, has any right to use violence to kill. That has always been my position, and I am sticking to it.

On the loyalist streets of Belfast, there are great signs saying, "Carson brought in guns. Paisley wants you to surrender them." They are written by the people who are sitting at the table with Northern Ireland politicians—some of whom are sitting opposite—negotiating peace. That is what they say about me, and it does me no harm at elections. People continue to vote for me or, if they have the choice of three names, I am still their first choice. I am truly thankful for that.

I should mention that there was a vicious attack on a Roman Catholic school in Broughshane. I denounced that attack and I condemned those who did it. They need not call themselves Protestants, as the Protestant ethos is civil and religious liberty for all. I also denounced with all my heart the armed gang that went into the Roman Catholic chapel at New Buildings near Londonderry and attacked the statue in that place of worship.

I should also tell the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) that when my churches are burned and bombed, the ecumenical clergy never say anything. They remain completely silent. I wonder why. I have never heard an ecumenical clergyman in Protestantism or a priest say that it was wrong to burn one of my churches. I have made my position clear and I welcome the opportunity to do so again in the House, as these things have to be said.

We cannot put the politics of Ulster into the heart of policing. The RUC cannot be radically altered because it must remain a professional force that can do what it has to do. The Secretary of State has not had a happy relationship with the RUC. Since May, she has visited only three police stations, yet she has met all manner of so-called community groups that are fronts for IRA-Sinn Fein. Last week, she met a group of people in south Armagh whose sole aim was the destruction of bases designed to protect the lives of soldiers and civilians.

The Bill transfers to the Secretary of State vast powers, giving her direct say over policing matters. Local accountability is to be removed altogether. When the Secretary of State came to Northern Ireland, she ensured that every DUP member of the Police Authority was removed. We are the second largest party in Northern Ireland. When the forum elections were held, the Ulster Unionists got 30 seats, we got 24, the SDLP got 21 and Sinn Fein got 17. We now have no representation on the Police Authority. We had a very good representative who was an ex-policeman who still has to be protected because he was a member of the Police Authority and has been attacked before, but the Secretary of State saw fit to ensure that he was not reappointed. That is how we have suffered, but it will no longer matter as the Police Authority will have very little power under the proposed scheme.

Mr. Peter Robinson: It might be worth while for my hon. Friend to comment on the fact that a number of groups, including Protestants, are discriminated against in the Police Authority. The majority on the Police Authority are Roman Catholics, despite the fact that the majority of the community in Northern Ireland are Protestant. Women are discriminated against on the Police Authority and there is discrimination against areas such as Fermanagh.

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

Of course, our party is discriminated against. Those factors were acknowledged publicly by the chairman of the Police Authority in a committee, yet there are still two empty seats. To this day, the Secretary of State has yet to fill them.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I know that my hon. Friend is on that committee. I remember hearing the question put to the chairman of the Police Authority and his reply. Of course there is discrimination. I do not like the set-up of the Bill. I am not so sure whether even the present Chief Constable will be about for very much longer. I think that there will come a time when there will be no Chief Constable of the RUC. The structures will be changed. The present Chief Constable better beware that he, too, can be sacrificed.

Mention has been made of the Royal Irish Constabulary—a fine force of men who, in very difficult days in Ireland, were the target of attack. The majority of them were Roman Catholics and some were Protestants. They were wiped out, sacrificed by the Government. The good men of the RIC became the foundation of the RUC. That is why, back in 1920, such a large percentage of the force were Roman Catholic. I would like a balanced police force, and for Roman Catholics to take up their positions.

I must say, however, that Roman Catholics in the police force have the best possible time. They move to the top posts because of their religion. In written answers, the House will soon know exactly how many of the sergeants, inspectors, superintendents and chief superintendents are Roman Catholics.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Those statistics are publicly on record and show that a Roman Catholic is twice as likely as a Protestant to be promoted in the RUC.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is good that the House has such information before it, so that hon. Members see that there is a another side to the story.

When the Bill goes through, there will be great rejoicing in the IRA camp. The Secretary of State will say, "There you are, we have moved towards you." I am told that, in every week until May, there will be some concession for the IRA. No doubt the Bill is part of the concession, but, at the end of the day, the problem will still be with us. What are we to do about it? There is only one answer: to make all men equal under the law and all men equally subject to the law. Our police force should have the Government's backing.

Why were no members of the public made amenable to the awful massacre of Enniskillen? I shall tell the House why. It was because the police officer who was warm on the trail and asked for more men was suddenly taken off the case and removed from Enniskillen. I had that officer with me. He called to tell me the whole sorry tale. Why was nobody caught? It was because there were people in Enniskillen who were too close to certain other people. That is why there are doves on the monument, but no mention that the murderous action was taken by the Irish Republican Army. Such things go to the heart of the problem.

The Government should start now a rigid policy of all men being equal under the law and all men being equally subject to it. That is the basis for a proper settlement. It is a question of law and order. Terrorists cannot be bought. If concessions are made, they will want more. Doing away with the oath will not be enough. Doing away with the name will not be enough. There is only one way in which to settle the problem: by everybody being equal under the law and being equally subject to it. When we come to that point, we will make progress.

8.23 pm

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I must put on the official record my rejection of the kind invitation of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) to join the Orange Order. As one who married into a Glasgow family in which every member is a fervent Celtic supporter, I would not have dared to go home, had I accepted the invitation. Also, I would lose 10,000 Catholic votes. I might pick up 10,000 Orange votes, but that is another story. The invitation is rejected.

My late grandmother, who came from Cork, would turn in her grave to hear me say that there was something a little Irish about the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) when he asked whether Scottish Members had a saying similar to the one that he recited: he who calls the piper plays the tune. I think that that was characteristic of him.

Before I offer a couple of observations on parts I and VII of the Bill, I should like to compliment and pay tribute to the officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who have conducted themselves over the years with remarkable courage and fortitude. I paid a small token of my tribute to the RUC officers who have been killed and maimed when I attended the Adjournment debate of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), which was about his campaign for—rightly and properly—reasonable compensation and decent pensions for injured officers and the families of officers who have been killed.

I was concerned by the report on Wednesday in *The Independent*, in which a claim was made that there is an unpublished RUC report on harassment of and prejudice against Catholic RUC officers. I should have thought that, if Catholic officers have suffered in such a way, it would be a deterrent to young recruits from nationalist communities. The story was a press story. I do not know in which other papers it appeared, but it caused me concern that such a claim was made in one of our broadsheets.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone is not in his place. Perhaps he needed some food after his fairly lengthy speech. He seemed to be shocked when I suggested that the title of the Royal Ulster Constabulary appears somewhat antiquated to a Scots Member. I think that I am right in saying that there are no royal constabularies anywhere in the multinational state that we call the United Kingdom other than the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Scottish oath has been perfectly acceptable to all officers in X division of the Strathclyde police force in my constituency. All our constabularies have disappeared. I know that there are more differences than similarities in policing between the west of Scotland and Northern Ireland, especially with regard to the dreadful violence that Northern Ireland has suffered. We in Scotland, to a considerable extent, have not suffered from such violent terrorist activities—not for many years, at any rate. I think that we could consider changing the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The issue of policing in Northern Ireland is, as was rightly pointed out by hon. Members on both sides of the House, of immense importance. That is acknowledged in the Bill and also in the book, "Human Rights on Duty", written by Mary O'Rawe and Linda Moore and recently published by the Committee on the Administration of Justice. After a remarkable piece of research into policing in Northern Ireland, in which the authors examined evidence from other nations that had had difficulties with policing divided communities, they concluded:

"In order to maintain the cease-fires, secure political stability and achieve social consensus, we must accept that changes to policing are important building-blocks. If policing change in Northern Ireland is managed in a fair and open way, involves the broad community, and brings about a police service which is representative, responsive, accountable and effective (because of greater community support), this will underpin and guarantee the peace."

It is difficult to argue against such sentiments. We are a long way from achieving those goals, but that is the direction we should take. The Bill goes some way to advancing the development of an accountable and representative police force.

Mr. Trimble: I shall not comment on the book that the hon. Gentleman quoted from, because I am not familiar with it or with the authors, but I am familiar with the Committee on the Administration of Justice and know that it is not a fair and impartial body. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in policing, it is important that the law is enforced fairly and impartially? Does he seriously suggest that that is not the case at present?

Mr. Godman: I agree that the law must be administered fairly and reasonably, but we have seen exceptions to that over the years. Indeed, the hon. Member for North Antrim said that problems had occurred in that area. Occasionally, some officers have displayed conduct that falls below those high standards, and no police force anywhere is immune to the bad copper. Nevertheless, we must ensure that the police force is representative of both traditions and both sexes. The Minister needs to ask the question that I asked about the article that appeared in *The Independent*.

We have heard some complaints about the Police Authority. It must be a genuinely representative civic body and must be given important responsibilities and a defined accountability. In Strathclyde, our police authority—which is known to both my hon. Friends on the Front Bench—is made up of representatives from the local authorities. That works well. It happens that most of those representatives are Labour, but that reflects the political composition of the councils in Strathclyde. We should aim for that in Northern Ireland also.

I shall refer to part VII, because I promised to make a short speech, unlike some of those that we have heard today, which were lengthy, to put it mildly. I support the brilliant idea of a police ombudsman, and I agree with the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) that the person who performs that important role must be independent of Ministers and civil servants. I see no difficulty with that, even though the person will be selected and appointed by the Secretary of State. If certain guarantees, outlined by my hon. Friend, are made in respect of the ombudsman's employment, he or she can remain independent of and detached from Ministers and civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office. It is important that whoever is appointed is independent and has genuine powers of discipline.

I should like to know more about the selection criteria. How will the ombudsman be appointed? From what area will he or she be recruited? Will he or she be recruited from the legal profession? Will one of the criteria be that he or she has to have a law degree? What staff will he or she have and, if deputies are appointed, will they be chosen by the ombudsman?

It is important for the two traditions to see the ombudsman working impartially. We have experience of such officers elsewhere. In Scotland, the local authority ombudsman is now widely accepted by politicians of all hues, and people know that they can complain to the ombudsman if local authorities act improperly. People in Northern Ireland should have similar access to the police ombudsman.

Policing is so important that the police force must be representative of both traditions and both sexes. The police officers themselves should be able to trust the ombudsman. Will representatives of the RUC be involved in the appointment? They should not be involved in selection, but will their views be taken into account, together with the views of representatives of civic society?

The Bill will take us some way along the road to a more modern police force. The objective must be to create a police force that is fairly representative of the communities that it serves and with which both traditions can readily and willingly identify. At the moment, we are some way away from achieving that goal. I should love to see a mostly unarmed police force in Northern Ireland, which is the sort of police force that I am used to in Strathclyde. Community policing was mentioned earlier by an hon. Member who talked about armed thugs. In Britain, we define community policing in the terms of the police officer who regularly attends meetings of community councils—or, south of the border, parish councils—and frequently meets the representatives of voluntary organisations. I could go along to a local care association meeting and, almost always, I would see the local community policeman. The Bill is pushing in that direction in terms of community policing, and not towards the absurd description that we heard earlier.

Finally, the Bill should be examined with care in Committee. I do not expect to be a member of the Standing Committee, but I hope that hon. Members who are will examine the Bill in a vigorous and tough-minded way. Were I to be on the Committee—that will not happen, I hope—I would offer fair-minded but tough criticism. Some clauses could be amended or sharpened to move towards our goal—the kind of police force with which most of us are familiar. The Committee must enhance the Bill and help Ministers define in detail what they mean by an independent police ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

8.40 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): As my coughing throughout the past four hours will have shown, I put the health of Northern Ireland before my own tonight. *[Interruption.]* I seek no sympathy from Government Front Benchers—simply their gratitude. In this regard, I am pleased that the tripartisan approach to Northern Ireland seems healthy. Concern was expressed last week by the Minister that the tripartisan agreement was in some jeopardy. I was reassured by the comments of the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) that it was not at risk.

[Mr. Lembit Öpik]

We support the Bill with some reservations. We feel that there is an excellent case for reform of the RUC, and a large section of the community has little faith in it. In fact, more than 80 per cent. of those who regard themselves as nationalist or republican believe that the RUC needs to be radically reformed or scrapped. However, that statistic does not lead to certain conclusions.

The first conclusion to which the statistic does not lead is that the RUC is at fault; that simply is not the case. The overwhelming majority of its officers are performing an extremely difficult job under the toughest of circumstances. Most signed up in more testing times, when officers were being ruthlessly targeted by the paramilitaries. Anyone who saw the pictures of officers bravely facing a barrage of petrol bombs at the weekend will recognise the need for clause 13, which proposes special rewards for civilians or officers performing worthy acts.

Secondly, the suspicion harboured by many about the RUC does not mean that if the RUC were reformed, renamed or revolutionised, it would gain the support of that part of the community that currently has no faith in it. It does not follow that those people will all come across—a point which has been made effectively already. The police force can be reformed in ways that will increase the number of people on all sides who have faith in its effectiveness and fairness. In looking for a way to reform the police force, we may be looking for something that does not exist in its entirety. However, as long as we are committed to improving the inclusive nature of the RUC, we must be serious about considering the source of concerns raised by nationalists, republicans and, for that matter, some people from the other side.

The third thing that suspicion about the RUC does not mean is that it is necessary simply to incorporate all the views of those who have been critical of the RUC in the past. That would make the RUC a political football and, to some extent, we have seen the sort of debate that will ensue if we allow the RUC to fall into the political arena, rather than being a neutral enforcer. We cannot descend into the mentality of looking at what nationalists want and what Unionists want and giving each group half of that. That is lowest-common-denominator politics, which will ultimately please no one. The RUC enforces political decisions and it must not in itself become a political decision maker. For that reason, we must be willing to regard the history of the RUC not as a resting place, but as a starting place.

It is not a sign of weakness to change something that has proved to be effective in certain areas but deficient in others. It is a sign of strength to make that point, and to recognise that it necessarily leads to change. Individuals can choose to feel betrayed by talk of change in the RUC; or, instead, they can be a part of that change. To that end, I hope that we are able to support the possibility of change within the principle that positive progress necessarily requires change.

I detect paranoia in some of our discussions on the military and the police force in Northern Ireland, and it is perfectly understandable that there are genuine worries about what change could lead to and whether it would disadvantage certain communities that are currently well served. We have to act in good faith and believe that all sides are genuinely committed to a settlement process, part of which involves a sensible debate about the kind of police service that we require in Northern Ireland.

The Government have tried to avoid the fallacies in drafting the Bill. The cosmetic changes to the police in the Bill are not half-nationalist, half-Unionist—they are neutral. The change of name—in spirit, at least—is to be welcomed. However, I have reservations about the specific proposal, the Northern Ireland police service. Inevitably, it will be abbreviated and known as NIPS, and that does not sound right to me. Something along the American lines, such as the Northern Ireland police department, would provide greater gravitas. That is not the key issue for debate tonight, but I hope that we are able to make progress in Committee.

We should try to find a name that will genuinely improve the sense of inclusiveness. Let us not pretend that we can have two names running side by side; one name or the other must be preferred. The biggest danger is that one section of the community will call the force by one name while the other section calls it by another, and we shall end up with a more divisive state of affairs. We must think carefully before we make that symbolic change.

Similarly, the new oath proposed in schedule 2 is welcome, although some might argue that it is cosmetic. There is some weight in the argument that it will make no difference—a point eloquently made by a number of speakers tonight. However, I believe that it will make a difference. I do not think that people make a life choice about a career in the RUC on the basis of the oath, but it is symbolic, and changing it could be regarded as something of a confidence measure.

The oath to the Queen is an indication of loyalty to the state, but a new oath would not mean disloyalty to the same state. Perhaps two oaths could be acceptable, and there is plenty of precedent for that. It is possible for a Welsh Member of Parliament to read the oath in Welsh or in English—albeit the words are the same.

I see no problem in making a concession that allows for two oaths—one of which is manifestly acceptable at the moment and the other, proposed in the Bill, which is for the future. If people on both sides are amenable to compromise, we might be able to reduce the influence or importance of the oath as a political statement. I hope that people will be progressive enough to take a risk on this subject.

I wish to refer to the matter of British citizenship. I have a strong sense of my Northern Irish roots, despite east European parents and the fact that I have lived on the mainland for more than a decade. Northern Irishness to me is not a set of legislative details—it is character, an attitude and a sense of humour. It is the accent; it is a question of how people in Northern Ireland entertain their outlook on life.

Perhaps we allow ourselves to be too detailed in the minutiae, when we should step back and recognise that we choose to make certain statements symbolic, and we can equally choose to accept certain changes as necessary and helpful, to show good will on both sides in the search for a more settled understanding of Northern Ireland's role in the United Kingdom. The concessions are not a betrayal to terrorists; that is evocative language, but it does not reflect the Government's true intent.

The proposal for an ombudsman, which has been long in the making, could be the most important part of the Bill, and we warmly welcome the innovation. The way in

which complaints against the police are investigated at present is clearly unsatisfactory. In the rest of the United Kingdom, complaints are examined by other forces—for example, a complaint against an officer in Wales might be investigated by officers from Merseyside or East Anglia—but complaints against RUC officers are investigated by other members of the RUC. That is the crucial problem.

The investigating officer must be two ranks higher than the officer under investigation, but that can provide little more than the most basic comfort to people who feel that they have a genuine grievance and who distrust the service. The Independent Commission for Police Complaints cannot provide the check that is required on such an investigation: the investigation itself must be reformed.

The key point is that the new ombudsman must be politically independent, be seen to be so, and have every prospect of remaining so for many years to come. The proposals go some way towards meeting that objective, but not nearly as far as they could. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made the point most effectively. Will the Government consider appointing the ombudsman in such a way—perhaps until retirement—that he or she is not beholden to the Government's political leanings?

Under the Bill as it stands, the ombudsman would be appointed for up to two five-year terms. We do not think that that provides enough independence. He might still be looking over his shoulder for a political steer, knowing that if he ignored such a steer in a crisis, he would soon be out of a job or out of funds.

The ombudsman might be starved of resources in that situation—we might question whether they will be sufficient from the outset—but he must not be starved of the opportunity to exercise independence. The reformed complaints procedure does not do enough to listen to complainants, except in the most specific cases. That again ties into the importance of having a system that can be trusted by the general public.

There should be a requirement to hold specific, clear and transparent consultations with complainants and to inform them how their complaints, whatever they may be, have proceeded. Imagine the case of a youth who claims that he was unjustifiably hit by an officer's baton and is told some weeks later that his complaint is not believed or is not important enough to take further; that is sure to be interpreted as simple confirmation that the system is loaded against him.

If the ombudsman specifically went through what the complainant alleged had happened, investigated it and came back to the complainant to explain the situation, even if no action was brought, the procedure would be smoother and confidence could be built on both sides. That process is open to abuse because much time could be wasted by spurious or unfounded claims, but it is far better to waste time and a little money if in the long term the complaints procedure is trusted. We strongly recommend that such considerations be taken into account.

Mr. Maginnis: I do not pretend to be an expert on the matter, but is the hon. Gentleman aware that complaints about police actions can be made by a third party on behalf of the person alleged to have a complaint, and that in many cases, when that person is faced with the reality and recognises the circumstances—perhaps that he had given cause for offence to the police—he withdraws that complaint? That is often interpreted as showing that the complaints procedure is not working, but in fact it works very well in that respect. The concept, created by the previous Government, of third parties being able to make complaints on others' behalf is slightly nonsensical.

Mr. Öpik: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about the matter, on the ground that he is much closer to it than I am, as I have lived on the mainland for a long time. I should welcome a comment from the Minister on the point.

Mr. Godman: Does the hon. Gentleman expect the ombudsman to be concerned exclusively with complaints or to be involved in giving guidance to the police?

Mr. Öpik: It is my experience that the extent of the role is often defined by the first person who takes it on. A proactive individual, who can see the opportunity to prevent certain events rather than simply reacting to them when they are brought to his or her desk, would be preferable. Again, I would be interested to hear how the Minister envisages the role evolving, bearing it in mind that it would take more resources for the ombudsman to take a proactive role.

The Liberal Democrats are also concerned about the increased powers to be centralised in the Secretary of State. Our main concern is that the measures will de facto reduce the decision making in the Province itself. We do not condemn the changes out of hand, but we are concerned that they represent the movement of decisions in the wrong direction. Any change in the tripartite arrangement should be made extremely cautiously, especially as it may be seen as a public reduction of responsibilities within the Province. This is a consensus issue, and I hope that there may be room for appropriate amendments as we discuss it in Committee.

The power for district councils to ask questions directly of the authority is to be welcomed. It reconnects local authorities and police authorities, and I, unlike others who have spoken, do not believe that it necessarily undermines existing structures. It could also go some way towards filling the desperate need to increase the real stature and influence of local authorities and elected local representatives in Northern Ireland.

The attempt to reform the structure by which the police service is financed is welcome. Unnecessary bureaucracy must indeed be done away with, and we would all join in the call to get rid of any waste in the system, but the note on the financial effects of the Bill is rather alarming. It says:

> "Current practices and procedures lead to bureaucracy and duplication and the intention is that the structural inefficiencies be removed and replaced with a streamlined and more effective support service."

That is a little suspicious, for two reasons. First, we must be careful not to eliminate something that has been effective, perhaps in a low-lying way, or that has been used without often being publicly appreciated as useful. Secondly, it is dangerous, in the ceaseless drive for savings, to monkey around with processes that have been set up most meticulously and with a good deal of pain.

[Mr. Öpik]

There may be savings there, but let us not move rashly. Let us ensure that we consult closely the people who will ultimately be responsible for administering the service as it stands.

Finally, there are some things that the Bill does not do. It does not overtly link the changes to the talks in progress, although the Minister of State alluded to that in his opening remarks. If, as we hope, there will soon be new political structures to govern Northern Ireland, they must have some ownership of policing there. One question that remains is to what extent the Minister feels that there will be scope to change things a little more, once the new structures have been established. We are sure that the linkage has to be there, because without that ownership, there is a danger that we shall once again miss an opportunity to weld the police service closely into whatever new structure prevails.

The Bill does not do enough to tackle the make-up of the RUC. For the many reasons that we have heard tonight, perhaps legislation can never do enough to encourage those from the nationalist communities to take up a career in the RUC. Nevertheless, we should not be afraid of considering that question and asking ourselves whether, for example, legislation that makes it clear that sectarianism will not be tolerated in the RUC would help and would remove some of the structural barriers to taking up a career in the RUC.

That said, we recognise that one piece of legislation cannot be a panacea, and we welcome the Bill. In some ways, it extends well beyond a gesture. In others, it still has some way to go. At later stages, we shall focus on the complaints procedure and the independence of the ombudsman. In the meantime, we give the Bill our support. Above all, I hope that we shall enjoy a reasoned and insightful Committee stage, when amendments are taken seriously, when the genuine concerns of Opposition Members and of hon. Members on the Unionist Benches behind me, and suggestions from elsewhere in the House, are recognised and, importantly, when the concerns of the professionals in the front line—in the police service—are taken into account. In that context, a tripartisan approach might be a constructive way in which to develop the Bill and to consider it successfully. May I be forgiven for saying: may the force be with you all.

9 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I rise partly to take note of the Minister's initial remarks on the context of this debate. Bertrand Russell once described the appropriate attitude of the philosopher as passionate disinterestedness. Those of us who want the present talks to prosper and succeed will agree that there is a role in this debate for those who want to exhibit passionate disinterestedness.

Also, it is hard to ignore the fact that well over 70 per cent. of the debate's time has been taken up by the views of three varieties of Unionist, who have collectively and in their different ways suggested that there is not a problem. They seem to have suggested that things are pretty much in order as they are, although the provisions for an ombudsman would be welcome in some quarters.

Those attitudes make it difficult for those of us who want to express even-handedness or even passionate disinterestedness. The moment we suggest that there is a problem and that the Bill is necessary at all, we are put on the wrong side of the fence. We are seen to be admitting that there is a problem and giving succour to people whose vile modes of behaviour have resulted in the 301 deaths of RUC officers about which we heard. I do not want to give succour to terrorists, but it would be foolish not to acknowledge that there is a problem. That problem can be specified in so many different ways that we often have difficulty trying to express why we need to move on.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) strongly suggested that there was no need to move on. Understandably, when he talks it is of his great pride in being British and of how there is a threat to the symbols and the sources of his commitment to the Union. I understand that attitude passionately, but the hon. and learned Gentleman lives in a community that is deeply divided. Although there are those who share his sense of identity, they constitute but 60 per cent. of the population and the other 40 per cent. do not share it. To take their needs seriously is not to be partisan. It is not to depart from even-handedness; it is to recognise that there is a problem. If my Unionist friends and those whom I respect in that party do not take it on board that there is a problem, we will never achieve any real community policing, or any real desire from the people of Northern Ireland as a whole to accept those who expedite the law. It is important that we acknowledge that there is a problem.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the hon. Gentleman putting forward the thesis that there is a problem, which he has yet to define, between 60 per cent. of society and 40 per cent. of society—in other words, along narrow, sectarian lines? If that is what he is suggesting, with the greatest respect I would repudiate that. In all my years living in Northern Ireland mainly, that is not my experience.

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. Gentleman, because he requires me to specify the problem. It is certainly not narrow. I do not think that it is sectarian either. I just think that the description that the hon. and learned Member for North Down gave of his Britishness would be shared only by about 60 per cent. of the people. The remaining 40 per cent. will, for example, have a very different relationship to culture and tradition. They will be more inclined to look south, whereas the other 60 per cent. will be more inclined to look east. These matters of identity are deeply etched into people's personalities.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman does not understand the point that I am making and the reality of the situation. He is suggesting that people's political aspiration exclusively governs their attitude towards policing. That suggests that there are not people in the Unionist tradition who, because they are beyond the pale on law and order, think very little of the RUC and that there are not people in the nationalist tradition, the majority of whom act within the law, who are content with what they have by way of policing, which has nothing to do with their ultimate political aspiration.

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. Gentleman again, as I am always willing to learn from him on these matters,

but what he said seems to underestimate the important need for change and reform in a huge number of areas in Northern Ireland, including policing.

Mr. Öpik: Is the hon. Gentleman willing to consider the fact that, as the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) made so clear, the danger of categorising the community in Northern Ireland as a 60:40 relationship oversimplifies it to such an extent that reforms could be damaging to those who are currently satisfied with the force? Indeed, one has to take a more sophisticated approach towards the issues in hand.

Mr. McWalter: I accept that a sophisticated approach is needed, but the starting point has to be, as the hon. and learned Member for North Down said, the strong sense of cultural identity felt by very many people in Northern Ireland. That has resulted tonight in Unionist Members portraying almost a seamless robe between themselves and the RUC. I understand that; the RUC has a tremendous record of courage, determination, coolness under fire and intelligence in its operations. I understand the pride that members of the Unionist community take in the RUC.

I also accept that, when a grave crime is committed in a nationalist area that people in that area believe they cannot handle within their own resources—such as the dreadful rape of a young girl—they are the first to call in the RUC. I agree with the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) to that extent. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that policing requires the consent of virtually the whole community. Although any society contains a group of people who will never give that function its assent, such a group must be relatively small for policing to be possible. In Northern Ireland, the minority who have a strong nationalist identity find that the degree of assent that they need for normal policing functions is, at least in part, withheld. That led the Chief Constable, when he spoke to the Select Committee recently, to refer to the abnormal policing conditions that obtain in Northern Ireland.

Once we accept that the current conditions are abnormal—I have just quoted the best possible authority for that judgment—we must ask ourselves how we can engender a return to greater normality. I believe that the Bill, in part, attempts to address that. It at least considers some of the more vexatious but relatively small matters that members of the nationalist community have found difficult to accept. I think that it would be generous of those of the Unionist persuasion here first to admit that there is a problem and, secondly, to be considerate about whether the sense of a lack of support for the police on the part of that section of that community can be dealt with.

I do not think that that is asking too much. If it is, it should perhaps be borne in mind that there has rarely been a time when it could be felt that the police function could be exercised normally. Once, in the mid-1970s, I was riding a motor bike through County Monaghan in the south of Ireland. I came to a bollard in the road. Because I was on a motor cycle and not in a car, I could have driven past it, but I did not because I knew that, if I had ridden past it, I might have been shot. The bollard was the border.

That same year, I visited Berlin, where the border was clearer and the electric fences more distinct. Borders are dangerous, however, and those who live near such edifices are much more inclined to be hostile to those who police, or exercise force at, such points than those up in North Antrim.

Mr. Maginnis: I am not aware of all these incidents in which motor cyclists are shot while travelling along the frontier with the Irish Republic. I wonder what gave the hon. Gentleman the idea that he was in such dreadful danger.

Mr. McWalter: On the boat going over, strong warnings were posted all over the place that people should cross the border only at approved crossing points. They were couched in the same language as warnings at borders elsewhere. Perhaps the people who put the bollard in the way had no wish to dissuade people from going to and fro, but I felt that they were minded to prevent people from passing that way. That, after all, is the function of a border.

I suggest that people who live in proximity to such a place have at least the potential for violence in their everyday existence. It does not become people to suggest that a return to such circumstances is healthy or desirable.

Mr. Mallon: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to clarify that point. I know that he did not mean it, but the implication was that, by definition, people who live close to the border have a greater propensity for violence than those who live elsewhere. As someone who lives close to the border, I dispute that. His point is that the circumstances in which violence can take place are greatly increased. It has nothing to do with the mindset of those people and their support for or abhorrence of violence.

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. Gentleman. He made the point better than me.

What I shall say in conclusion is meant in the kindest possible way. Even if our Unionist friends regard some of the obstacles to the acceptance of the police force by people in the nationalist community as unreasonable, they should make a generous gesture so that we can try to overcome this intractable problem.

9.16 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I did not intend to take part in the debate, because our party's position was admirably expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). However, I am sorry to have to tell the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) that what he said was so misconceived that it is necessary to respond briefly.

The Chief Constable said that circumstances in Northern Ireland are abnormal. What is abnormal is the existence of terrorism by a group that is trying to overthrow the constitution. Generally speaking, the legislation in force in Northern Ireland contains no abnormality. When the hon. Gentleman talked about divisions, my hon. Friend and I were disturbed that he expressed his argument in purely sectarian terms. His reference to 60 per cent. and 40 per cent. shows that he was thinking in sectarian terms. That is not correct. To people in Northern Ireland of both religious denominations and both traditions, it is not acceptable to talk in sectarian terms, as he did.

Mr. McWalter: Not once did I mention religion.

Mr. Trimble: I am sorry to have to tell the hon. Gentleman that hon. Members from both major traditions

[Mr. Trimble]

in Northern Ireland are very good at deconstructing speeches, and we well understand what lies behind the terms used, even if it is not said explicitly.

The hon. Gentleman expressed his view in sectarian terms and said that there was a problem. That implies that he thinks there is a problem with the legislation. He should bear in mind the fact that the role of any police force, whatever it is called, is primarily to enforce the law. He can either criticise the law or the way in which it is enforced. There is no accusation that the legislation in Northern Ireland contains sectarian elements, although I noticed that a member of the SDLP suggested at its party conference that the newly introduced system of penalty points for road traffic offences was a Unionist plot to do down the nationalists of south Armagh.

Mr. Mallon: I must reply to that. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong. That was not said at the SDLP conference. The remark did not relate to south Armagh and it was not about the matter that the hon. Gentleman mentions. The hon. Gentleman leads a party and knows that views are expressed within it. Why, oh why does every political sin that is committed in the north of Ireland come to rest in south Armagh?

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman implicitly concedes that it was an SDLP comment, and he must concede that it was made in the context of his party conference. I accept his reproof about south Armagh. Like me, the hon. Gentleman would not treat such comments seriously. We all know that some people make silly comments.

As I have said to the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead, there is generally no complaint about the legislation on the statute book. From time to time there may be complaints about the effectiveness of the police force as a whole or about individual police officers. However, I take it that there is no serious complaint about the ordinary law and the general run of RUC operations, nor is it said that it is not the policy of the service to administer the law as fairly and impartially as it can.

Against that background, to say that there must be changes because of a political or sectarian division is to introduce political considerations into the structure and operation of the police force. That is not acceptable, and that is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone tried to make when he complained about the Bill stripping from the Police Authority functions that were put there to try to ensure that the police force operated in a fair and impartial way.

We come back to the question of terrorism that is directed to the overthrow of the constitution. In response to that, we cannot change the ordinary legislation nor can we change the way in which the law is administered because the objective must still be to administer it fairly and impartially.

Mr. McWalter: I should like to clarify an issue now that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) is back in his place. The word terrorism is being used in two distinct ways. It is used as a broad term and, specifically, to refer to extreme republican terrorists. Some terrorists perhaps seek to overthrow the constitution; other terrorists seek to defend it.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that terrorism has more than one source. However, the cause of the current terrorist problem is the terrorist groups that are trying to overthrow the constitution, and to that there has been a violent reaction by some groups. They hit back, as they think, in a way that is quite inexcusable in any circumstances.

It cannot be seriously suggested that in response to terrorism we change legislation that is generally admitted to have no political or sectarian overtones or that the police force should no longer try to operate in a fair and impartial manner. What has been suggested? The suggested changes can only relate to the constitution itself, and that is not acceptable because the democratic principle that the constitutional destiny is determined by the views of the greater number has to be accepted.

Mr. McWalter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Trimble: No. I have given way a couple of times and I should like to complete this point.

One is left with questions of symbolism and, in effect, the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead said that these changes should be accepted as symbols. I do not know what effect those symbolic changes will have on the problem that is said to exist. The change of name can be seen as not mollifying one side while causing deep offence to the other, and it is foolish to think that anything significant could happen if there were a change of name. I trust that there will not be. I hear assurances from Ministers that there will not be, but I wonder what on earth the draftsman was doing. No doubt he was given inadequate instructions and this matter will be sorted out later.

There are other symbolic matters to be addressed. I thought at one stage that the hon. Gentleman was going to suggest that we should put members of the RUC in a green uniform, and put a harp and some shamrocks on their cap badge. That symbolism already exists. There is a crown on top of the harp, but does not that give the right balance? The symbols are already taken care of, if people would only look and see them.

People must take care not to be seduced into thinking that there is anything seriously wrong with the legislation or with the objectives of the force. The objectives may not always be met fully, and individuals can cause problems, which is why there should be provisions in the legislation to deal with those failings. That has always been supported by this party. However, to speak in simplistic terms about a problem that requires some unspecified major changes is misconceived.

9.25 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I reiterate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). The official Opposition will not oppose the Government on Second Reading, as we feel that the Bill in the main follows some of the developments that were being taken forward during the lifetime of the previous Government. We recognise in part of the Bill many of the developments that were in train at that time.

Nevertheless, in parts of the Bill the Government find themselves between a rock and a hard place. Even the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) is

unhappy. He does not think that the Bill goes far enough. All the speakers who have taken part in the debate from the Unionist side—the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), and the hon. Members for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley)—have opposed some of the Bill's components.

I welcome the change of mind to which the Minister alluded in his opening remarks. The Government have changed their mind about the procedure through which they would introduce the legislation. We welcome the fact that, instead of taking it through as an Order in Council, they have taken the Bill on the Floor of the House. By extension, that presumably means that the Government are prepared in Committee to have the Bill taken apart line by line and clause by clause. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to have the Minister's assurance. The last time that he gave me an assurance in Committee that the Government would welcome a lengthy debate on the EPA, we kept the Government up for 12 hours, because they would not give us a reasonable timetable.

Mr. Ingram: You did not table any amendments.

Mr. Moss: We tabled amendments on Report. It does not matter when we tabled them. The procedures of the House allow for amendments to be tabled not only in this place at various stages, but in the other place.

I hope that, when he winds up, the Under-Secretary will give the House an assurance that adequate time will be given to the Bill in Committee. It is a long Bill, with more than 60 clauses. Hon. Members who have contributed to the debate have repeatedly asked for an assurance that the Bill will not be rushed through in one sitting, and that there will be a sittings motion so that we can plan ahead and consider the Bill properly.

I endorse the comments of the Minister of State that he is seeking through the Bill to build on the strengths of the RUC. I am not sure that he achieves that in the Bill as drafted, but I endorse his aim. He paid tribute to the RUC, and I am more than happy to endorse the views that he expressed.

I also pay tribute to the Police Authority. Let it not be forgotten that, over many years, many members of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland have faced the same kind of intimidation as many police officers in the RUC have had to face.

As I said earlier, this Bill builds on the previous Government's White Paper. In a press release on 1 May 1996, the then Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, set out proposals for the reform of the tripartite system of police governance in Northern Ireland. He said that the proposals sought to build on the consensus that has been shown to exist for a police service which upholds and is seen to uphold the law fairly, with rigorous impartiality, efficiency and effectiveness, which is accountable both to the law and, through a strong and independent police authority, to the community, and furthermore is responsive to that community.

The Minister said that the Bill has four main strands. He clarified the role of the tripartite system. In an earlier Labour party publication there was some question about the future of that system. I am delighted that the Government have decided to strengthen that three-legged stool for the police in Northern Ireland.

The Bill provides for a structure for investigation of complaints. It follows on from the work of Dr. Hayes, who was commissioned by the previous Government to look at the complaints procedure. He produced an excellent report recommending that the Government set up an ombudsman for police complaints, which was warmly welcomed by the previous Government.

I must ask the Minister a question that has already been asked several times this evening—why this Bill at this particular time? It could be said that the Bill implements some of the proposals put forward by the Labour party in its policy document last year. On the other hand, some of the more important proposals in that document have not been included. I shall say more about that later.

We are left with the feeling that with the Government's difficulties in bringing legislation forward quickly enough, someone said to the Northern Ireland Office, "Have you got a Bill ready to fill a Second Reading opening?" That is how it comes across. We have already been told this evening that there is no rush to get the Bill into Committee, so why is it having its Second Reading a week before Christmas? Perhaps the Minister will answer that question. As hon. Members have said—especially the hon. and learned Member for North Down—the Bill has been introduced at this time because it is part of the overall political dimension. It is something that is being offered in the talks process.

The explanatory and financial memorandum refers to giving

"effect in Northern Ireland to certain proposals for police reform which were set out in the Labour Party consultation paper 'Policing in Northern Ireland—A Service for all People'".

As I said earlier, some of the main proposals in that document have not been included in the Bill. Page 9 of the document said that, currently, the Secretary of State appoints members of PANI from various sections of Northern Ireland society such as trades unions, local government, industry and social services. It said that Labour did not quarrel with this representation, but believed that, rather than being appointed, we should narrow the democratic deficit and ask those bodies to choose their own representatives.

On page 10, in the final paragraph of the section dealing with the future of the Police Authority, the document said that the Labour party believed that these interim proposals—there are a number of them, but incorporating the one I have mentioned—would strengthen PANI by ensuring that the police were accountable to the people of Northern Ireland and making it possible for those groups that currently will not accept membership of PANI to join the body.

However, schedule 1, paragraph 2(1) states:

"The Police Authority shall consist of—

(a) a chairman;

(b) a vice-chairman; and

(c) not less than 14 nor more than 20 other members, appointed by the Secretary of State."

I should like to know whether the intention of that wording is any different from that which currently applies. I cannot see any real difference in it. The wording certainly does not incorporate that very important section of the Labour party's document of last year. I should like the Under-Secretary of State to tell the House how the Government believe that the new wording will lead to a more balanced composition on the Police Authority.

[Mr. Moss]

Some hon. Members have mentioned the current composition of the Police Authority, and have made known their opposition to the Bill. The Minister of State expressed some surprise, saying that he was not aware of any opposition. How could he not be aware of opposition to a Bill of such importance?

I ask the Under-Secretary of State to tell the House what consultation has been conducted on the Bill. Have any requests from the Police Authority for meetings been refused, as was alleged earlier in the debate? It is appropriate that the Minister should answer that question. How on earth can Ministers turn down requests for meetings from a body as important as the Police Authority—the very future of which is under threat in the legislation?

How many meetings have there been in the consultation process? How many written submissions has the consultation produced? Have they been placed in the Library? If not, may we have copies of the submissions, and could they be sent to relevant politicians?

Mr. Maginnis: I do not want to delay the hon. Gentleman, but I am rather confused. He said initially that the Bill, by and large, is the one that the previous Government would have introduced. Just a moment ago, however, he suggested that the Police Authority was under threat. Will he clarify the matter?

Mr. Moss: I am sure that tomorrow's *Hansard* will show that I said that, had we still been in government, we would have introduced large sections of the Bill, but that some sections of it, in its earlier clauses—I alluded to the Police Authority—require thorough investigation.

Clause 2 establishes a new body—the Northern Ireland police service, which was alluded to by the hon. and learned Member for North Down—and renames the Northern Ireland police force, from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to a police service—which incorporates traffic wardens and civilians. It is easy to see from how the legislation is written that, by deleting two lines, the RUC would be deleted entirely from the Bill and the name of the new police service would be left intact.

I have already praised the work of Dr. Hayes. Sir Patrick Mayhew also praised his work, in January 1997, when his report was first published.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh raised the matter of the standard of proof. He said that the standard to which he alluded—the civil standard—has not been changed in the Bill. I cannot find the reference that he made, but he said that, in disciplinary proceedings, he wanted use of the civil rather than the criminal standard. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that point in his reply.

Page 12 of the Labour document to which I have already referred said that Labour believed that it would be foolish to allow names, uniforms and other matters to dominate the debate, and that symbols must not be allowed to get in the way of substance. Labour said that it was the structural changes which were fundamental. Why then has the Labour party changed its mind on the symbolism of the oath?

The Minister needs to satisfy the House on several key points. Why have the Government introduced this Bill at this time? To judge from the comments that have been made by hon. Members of all parties, it seems to have satisfied no one at this juncture. There has been sufficient opposition on Second Reading to show that many hon. Members believe that there are flaws in the Bill and that changes will be needed as it proceeds through its various stages. Indeed, the Secretary of State implied as much in her press release of 4 December. The final part of the press release states:

"The Bill does not preclude discussion of policing in the talks"—

a point alluded to by the hon. Member for North Antrim.

"Indeed, we have given the commitment that any agreement reached in talks on the issues covered in this Bill will be taken on board during the passage of the Bill, if that is possible. If not, we will seek to implement them at a later stage."

That is an admission that the Government have introduced legislation that they do not think fits all circumstances and which certainly is not perfect. If they are prepared to accept amendments as a result of the talks process, how much more should they take on board the comments and opinions of hon. Members either on Second Reading or especially in Committee? To return to my initial point, we seek an assurance that sufficient time will be afforded in Committee to ensure that the Bill receives adequate scrutiny.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tony Worthington): This has been a fascinating debate. At one stage, I thought that I would have to speak for two hours, but I now have only 19 minutes so I cannot deal with all the points that have been raised. In my view, it is fascinating to return to this subject because, as the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) said, I was involved with the discussion document on policing in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) said that the Bill had been cobbled together. In many ways, the Bill has had the gestation period of an elephant having two foals in succession, because its origin goes back to 1994. As the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire knows, a consultation paper was published in 1994, under the previous Government, and was followed by a White Paper. In other words, there has been an enormous amount of consultation on many aspects of the Bill.

I was involved with the Police and Magistrates Courts' Act 1994, which covered England and Wales and also had a Scottish component. In many ways, this is the Bill that we considered then. Various allegations have been made about the reasons for introducing the Bill, but it is interesting that it simply seeks to achieve what has already been achieved in England, Wales and Scotland. That is the fact of the matter. The Act has improved the efficiency of the police.

Mr. Trimble: I am pleased that the Minister draws a parallel with the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. He will remember the intense controversy that surrounded the suggestion that the Home Secretary would appoint members to the police authorities in England and Wales, yet the Minister is now supporting a Bill which provides that everyone on the Police Authority in Northern Ireland is to be appointed by the Secretary of State. He knows

that one of the things to which objection is taken is the removal of the representative element from appointments to the Police Authority.

Mr. Worthington: I am deeply grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because that allows me to move on to the contribution of the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire. He asked why, when the appointment of the members of the Police Authority had been mentioned in the Labour party's consultation document, it was not in the Bill. In the judgment of my colleagues, it would not be appropriate for such issues to be in the Bill. A consultation paper on the composition of the Police Authority will come out separately from the Bill. The reference to the appointment of the Police Authority by the Secretary of State is simply the legal way of referring to that process, but it will be the subject of a consultation paper in the new year, which will deal with how to make the authority more responsive and reflective of the people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) referred to practice in Scotland, where it is simple for a police authority to be representative of the whole community because there is a tradition of representatives from the district councils being appointed in proportion to their numbers on the councils. One of the problems in Northern Ireland is that the Association of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland does not have the allegiance of all the political parties. That will have to be addressed.

Mr. Trimble *rose—*

Mr. Worthington: I notice that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene for the second—and, I fear, last—time.

Mr. Trimble: I note the Minister's reference to a consultation paper. That evades the point that the detailed provisions for the police authorities were contained in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, to which he has referred. Measures that are not in the Bill are open to the discretion of the Secretary of State, which, time and again over the past 25 years, has been abused. We would like representative authorities and proportionate appointments. Previous Secretaries of State have not given us that. We want more than an assurance—we want it in the Bill.

Mr. Worthington: We are proceeding sensibly, with a consultation paper on how the Police Authority should become more representative of the whole community.

Rev. Ian Paisley *rose—*

Mr. Worthington: This will be the last intervention that I accept.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have a simple question for the Minister. Will the consultation paper be with us before the Committee stage of the Bill?

Mr. Worthington: I should like to be certain of being able to give that assurance, but I cannot give it because I do not know the date on which the Committee stage will begin. It is certainly our intention that the consultation paper should come out as soon as possible. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

An enormous number of issues have been raised. I shall not be able to deal with them all. Not everybody agrees with what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said, but he was right to say that there is a huge problem with policing in Northern Ireland because it is seen as symbolic. We could not have had a debate on policing anywhere else in the United Kingdom in which no one mentioned crime, vandalism, anti-social neighbours or any of the other issues that would be raised on a police Bill for England and Wales or Scotland. We have heard only about the constitutional issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) was right to say that there is a problem that we must address. The relationship of the Bill to the talks is important. We are right to move forward with the Bill because it will be a significant improvement, whatever happens in the talks. We wish the talks well, but we recognise that in the negotiations people will have things to say about policing. The great reward of any settlement will—I hope—be that the people from all sides who sign up to it will then give their unhesitating support to the police force.

Mr. Mallon: I take the Minister's point, but is he suggesting that that type of reaction will come after a practical agreement without the fundamental changes which he has himself accepted? That seems contradictory to me.

Mr. Worthington: I do not see any contradiction, but we may explore that later. I am saying that what happens in the talks and what happens here are two parts of a whole. We are right to move forward by improving policing, and right to expect that one consequence of a settlement in the talks will be that the policing problem in Northern Ireland will be greatly eased.

Mr. Godman: There are 70 or so clauses and six schedules to the Bill, and although I do not expect to serve on the Standing Committee, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he intends to provide Committee members with notes on clauses? They would be very helpful.

Mr. Worthington: Yes, as with every Committee I have ever served on. By the way, if my hon. Friend says once more that he does not want to be on the Committee, he will find himself on it. We are certainly serious about providing adequate time to deal with the Bill in Committee.

I pay tribute to Dr. Maurice Hayes, whom everyone has praised, and to his ombudsman proposals. Reaching such an agreement is a remarkable achievement, and I know just how hard he worked to achieve it. It will mean that relationships between police and public, and police and police authorities, in Northern Ireland will be better than those anywhere else in the UK.

Many hon. Members have referred to the powers and security of tenure of the ombudsman, and his ability to take up cases on behalf of third parties. Those are all essentially points for the Committee. We took advice on the ombudsman from Sir Len Peach, the Commissioner of Public Appointments. His role is to take the politics out of public appointments; his advice, in the first instance, was that tenure should be for five years, as we have said, with the option of extension to 10 years. I believe that the same applies to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. We can consider that.

[Mr. Worthington]

Things have turned out as they have because of our attempt to remove the issue from the political domain. Public appointments are usually advertised, there will be interviews, and there will be consultation with the Police Authority and other bodies to ensure that the ombudsman's terms of reference are laid down fairly.

As for whether the Police Authority supports the Bill, it would be highly unusual if it did support a Bill that transferred some of its resources. I grant the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) that this is a contentious area.

Once again, we are simply extending what has happened elsewhere in Great Britain by giving the Chief Constable responsibility for all the resources under his control. The current position in Northern Ireland appears to be rather strange. The Chief Constable has control over the men and women of the RUC, but not over the buildings and equipment. It seems odd that there should be such a division. The previous Government agreed that it should be addressed and that the Chief Constable should have responsibility and accountability for all the resources. There will be savings because certain central services are duplicated unnecessarily.

Mr. Maginnis: How much will they be?

Mr. Worthington: I cannot say exactly, because no one has worked out the structures. However, there will be one structure instead of two, and her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary has said that there will be savings. Those efficiencies will be made.

Mention has been made of standards of proof. Hayes recommended that standards of proof in respect of police complaints should be reduced to the level accepted in the civil courts. The Select Committee on Home Affairs is considering the matter. In respect of police discipline, the RUC has tended to follow the English and Welsh pattern, so it makes sense to wait for the conclusions of the Select Committee. I was informed that, although the Scottish pattern has been applied to civil cases, it would be sensible to keep in harmony with the English and Welsh rules.

I want to guarantee that the ombudsman will be independent. It is a big step to say that the ombudsman genuinely must be in charge of the cases, the procedure and who staffs his or her office. One point that was raised was whether the ombudsman would have the power to take up third-party complaints. The position remains as at present. Solicitors and others who are involved may bring complaints to the Independent Commission for Police Complaints.

Some wild words were said about the transfer of large powers to the Secretary of State. The Bill transfers no powers to the Secretary of State. Many of the points that were quibbled with tonight were straight copies of previous legislation that changed nothing.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone always accuses me of ignoring him and that is totally untrue. He referred to community police liaison committees. They are not mentioned on the face of the Bill because they are not statutory bodies. There will continue to be consultation with CPLCs, but we are extending that consultation to district councils. It is a step forward and one of the many reasons why I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

POLICE (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State under that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other statutory provision.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT (CHRISTMAS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic Adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Monday 22nd December, do adjourn till Monday 12th January.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the Questions on motions 4 to 8.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Animals

That the Mink Keeping Order 1997, dated 17th November 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th November, be approved.

Northern Ireland

That the draft Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.

Legal Aid and Advice (Scotland)

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

Legal Aid and Advice (Scotland)

That the draft Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Prescribed Proceedings) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

Firearms

That the draft Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1997 Compensation Scheme, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Beef on the Bone

10.1 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): It is my great privilege to present a petition from the National Federation of Meat and Food Traders and members of its executive council on behalf of its retail butcher members throughout England and Wales. It has no fewer than 107,000 signatures, all of which have been collected in the past three days. It is signed on behalf of the federation by Mr. Fuller, the director, Mr. Wakelin, the president, and by Mr. Tyler, Mr. Curtis and Mr. Cockburn, members of the executive council.

The petition states:

The National Federation of Meat and Food Traders object to the Government's intended ban on the sale of beef on the bone.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to revert to the alternative recommendation of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee; that the Government should provide the Committee's research findings to the public, so that the public can decide what precautions to take.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Beer (Illegal Imports)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

10.3 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): The week before Christmas seems a timely occasion to debate beer, with so many people now joining in the festive spirit. Few households in the country will not have already bought in some beer or be intending to do so. Clubs and pubs will expect good custom and office parties are already in full swing. However, this is also a time to give careful consideration to what is happening to the British beer industry, and I mean all parts of the industry, including those who brew beer, distribute it and sell it in pubs, clubs and shops.

Beer is a part of the British way of life. The variety of beers that is brewed in different parts of our country is part of our culture and heritage. We are famous all over the world for the variety of tastes and types of beer and our local pubs. That variety also ensures that we do not become a boring monoculture. The beer industry is to us what the wine industry is to France.

However, how much of the beer drunk this Christmas will be smuggled beer, illegally imported and sold—bootleg beer? Some 5 per cent. of the total UK beer market is now French beer—that is 1.5 million pints a day. France is now the fifth largest brewer in our country and has more sales than any one UK regional brewery. That costs the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds a year in lost duty alone.

In 1996, nearly 100,000 bootleggers' vans made the channel crossing and the bootleggers reach all parts of the country. It is not only Carlsberg that reaches the parts that other beers cannot reach. Imports were up 18 per cent. last year and if that continues, they will represent 10 per cent. of the beer market by 2001. Not all of that beer is illegally imported, because it is not illegal to bring back some cases of beer in the boot for personal consumption. Such examples are not the subject of my debate tonight. I am worried about bootleg beer—beer that is smuggled in and sold on for profit.

It is illegal to import vast quantities and sell it, but that is happening on a large scale in white vans, estate cars and on the backs of heavy goods vehicles. In many workplaces around the country, people can place their orders and their requests are delivered the next week. In some parts of the country, milkmen are said to deliver to the doorstep. What that amounts to is a significant and growing black economy. History shows that we should all be worried about a black economy, because it is a dangerous game in more ways than one.

I shall look first at the impact on the British beer industry, which is an important national industry. Some 910,000 jobs are supported by the brewing industry, and pubs and clubs alone. If we add the jobs in other retail outlets, we can see the size of the industry. It is being hurt. Some 80 per cent. of imported beer represents beer that would have been bought in the UK, brewed, sold and distributed by British people. One white van load contains some 1,500 pints, which is more than the weekly beer sale of a small pub.

Bootlegging is a double unfairness to the industry. Not only do the bootleggers pay no excise duty, but they pay none of the other taxes—income tax, rates, national

[Mr. Bob Blizzard]

insurance, corporation tax—that legitimate brewers and retailers pay. No wonder they are incensed. Unfair competition is too weak a phrase. The black economy gnaws away at the honest living of more than 1 million people. Brewers, publicans and shopkeepers in my constituency of Waveney rightly complain about such activities. In Kent, a third of all beer consumed is foreign beer.

However, that is not the only consequence of a black economy. A black economy attracts and breeds crime. Smuggling is itself a crime, but the problem does not stop there. Organised crime gets involved. The money to be made from smuggling has become a magnet for criminals all over the country. The police have made a direct link between duty dodging and a rise in organised crime, especially in Kent. Violent crime is also increasing and people have been injured in shoot-outs in Dover, in violence reminiscent of warfare between rival drug gangs. Some 70 per cent. of bootleggers intercepted by customs have a criminal record. Bootleggers operate completely outside the law, so it is not surprising that alcohol is sold indiscriminately to the under-aged. The black economy gnaws away at a decent society.

There is also a huge impact on Government tax revenue. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise says that £165 million in revenue was evaded this year by smuggling, with a further £50 million lost from legitimate cross-border shopping. To this should be added the loss of other taxes from lost business and closed pubs. The black economy also gnaws away at the public purse.

Three weeks ago, I was one of a group of Members of Parliament who went on a fact-finding visit to Calais—I can see one or two of the other hon. Members from that group in the Chamber tonight. There are now 41 outlets in Calais aimed at cross-channel trade, all paying taxes to the French exchequer rather than to ours. It was apparent even in the British-named supermarkets in Calais that there would have to be some pretty big private parties for some of the amounts being bought by individuals to qualify for personal consumption. However, those outlets did at least maintain normal respectable standards for retail outlets, which is more than can be said for some of the other establishments we visited later in the day.

At the next venue, we saw lorry drivers pushing six-foot-high trolley loads of beer out to their trucks, and coming back for more. There were lots of furtive looks in this car park. Again, however, that was a reasonable retail warehouse. As the day progressed, we descended like Dante though the standards of respectability.

The worst places were those frequented by the infamous white bootlegger vans. At one, called Eastenders, they did not even bother putting the prices in French francs—just straight pounds. It seems that economic and monetary union has come early to that trade. Here we saw forklift trucks lifting pallets straight into the back of vans with no furtive looks—it was that open. The last place we visited had no prices at all and was really very shady. It seemed to deal only in pounds.

Only one thing was even more dubious that day—the allegation, which I have heard since in my constituency, that some bootlegged beer is being brewed in this country, "sold" to France and "sold" back at French prices to this country without the beer ever leaving this country. If that is going on, that really is a black economy.

Why is all this happening? The root cause is simple—beer duty here is nearly seven times higher than in France. However, this was not a significant problem until the introduction of the single market in 1993. Before then, there were tight limits on the amount of beer which could be brought in by individuals, and it was fairly well policed by customs.

One might have thought that the Government of the day would have foreseen what would inevitably happen following the introduction of the single market. Instead, the previous Government made two huge blunders. They accepted an indicative limit of 110 litres of beer per person as the legal limit which an individual could bring into the country per trip for personal consumption. One hundred and ten litres is the average amount a person drinks per year. The Government could have applied for a derogation to reduce that limit, but they did not. Right from the start, that made it more difficult for customs officers to deal with bootleggers.

More amazingly, we were told on the trip that the number of customs officers dealing with excise work was reduced from about 300 to just 12. I know that the previous Government were keen on charters, but that was a bootlegger's charter. On our return journey, we received a presentation from Customs and Excise and we learnt about the valuable work it does. We learnt that the new Government have increased numbers to 130 at present, and we heard how the Government are working with other agencies to mount an assault on smuggling. We heard also that detections have increased and that the Government are tackling van hire companies.

We heard also about the scale of the problem and how difficult it is for customs to stop, search and ultimately prosecute bootleggers. At peak times, some 500 vans a day are on the Dover-Calais run. It is common for 200 vans to make the journey in one night. I believe that the commendable effort of Customs and Excise is only scratching at the surface of the problem. There will continue to be bootleggers and a black economy as long as the incentive remains in the form of the huge differential in beer duty rates between Britain and the other European countries, and especially France, backed up by the 110-litre indicative limit.

Britain alone in the European Union has a problem on this scale. France and others seem unlikely to raise their excise duty on beer by any great amount, and it is not easy for our Government to lower beer duty, because the revenue implications have to be considered, but the terms of reference of the review announced and set up by the new Government to examine alcohol and tobacco fraud and smuggling included tax rates.

The brewing industry has presented a paper to the Treasury, drawn up by Oxford Economic Forecasting, which argues that the effect of a 20 per cent. reduction in duty would be to increase revenue to the Exchequer within three years, without an overall increase in beer consumption. It would also increase employment, it is argued, by 24,000. That argument uses the Treasury's own economic model. Although that model was found wanting in relation to Reaganomic and Thatcherite income tax reductions, it is held by the brewers to be good for taxes such as excise duty.

I believe that the Treasury should examine that model as part of the review. The argument deserves attention and response, although I would not advocate duty reduction on tobacco, on the simple ground that tobacco kills. The question of the indicative limit should also be addressed.

Bootleg beer and its black economy present us with a major problem that customs alone cannot solve. As I said, British beer is part of our culture and heritage. The very future of the community pub, our British local, is at stake, as is the rich variety of distinctive beers. The French would not tolerate such a threat to their wine industry. They would take action, and so, I believe should we. We must defend British beer.

10.16 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): I have noted the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), but I do not intend to comment on all the points he raised because, as he will know, Shepherd Neame, a leading brewer, has instigated a judicial review, which is to be heard tomorrow, in which it contends that the inflation-only increase in excise duty on beer, which constitutes between ½p and 1p per pint, imposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget, is contrary to Community law.

The Government are resisting the judicial review. It would be wrong for me to comment in detail on the issues that will be debated before the High Court tomorrow. I know that my hon. Friend will understand that clearly. I emphasise the fact that the Government take excise smuggling and fraud extremely seriously.

Customs and Excise has faced new challenges since the loss of routine checking of incoming transport and passengers from the European Union at ports and airports as a result of the introduction of the single market on 1 January 1993.

Customs has responded in several ways. Specially trained officers will challenge individuals or vehicles thought to be engaged in smuggling and will follow up intelligence leads about smuggling. The intelligence comes from a number of sources: the police; trading standards officers; overseas fiscal officers; members of the public and the trade. An excise alliance has been formed with the trade with the aim of combating smuggling and fraud.

Detection of smuggled excise goods by customs staff amounted to about £14.8 million in revenue for the financial year 1995–96, and £29.4 million in 1996–97. Offenders who are caught face financial penalties, court fines, prison sentences up to seven years, seizures of goods and confiscation of the proceeds of their crimes. Licensees caught dealing in illicit excise goods risk losing their licences.

Customs has recently announced new measures to crack down on irresponsible companies that persistently lease vehicles to known smugglers. That new move should prove a powerful incentive to rental companies to ensure that their vehicles are not regularly used by smugglers and it has the support of the major trade associations.

On the first occasion smuggled excise goods are found in a hire vehicle, the rental company will receive a written warning. If the same person is caught smuggling using a vehicle from the same company, the company will be charged £250 or 5 per cent. of the duty evaded and, on any subsequent occasion, the lower of either the revenue value of the smuggled goods or the trading value of the vehicle, up to a maximum of £10,000.

Excise verification officers combat the evasion of duty on smuggled revenue goods. Their work involves detecting and investigating those found to be involved in dealing with illegally imported alcohol and tobacco. They are supported in their work by specialist investigators, intelligence staff and VAT and Customs and Excise staff.

Customs is deploying additional officers to front-line work in areas of concern. About 330 officers are deployed in combating smuggling from the European Union. The number of officers engaged in that task has increased significantly in recent years. In 1993, it was only 200. An additional 70 staff have been deployed in the past 12 months.

As is well known, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced a review of alcohol and tobacco fraud involving a working party with the key associations to look into the effects of commercial fraud that my hon. Friend mentioned—smuggling and cross-border shopping. The review does not include duty rates as those are a matter for the Chancellor. I have set the review team a challenging deadline of 31 December 1997 to prepare a report for me.

The amount of revenue evaded in duty and VAT as a result of smuggling beer and cider, while highly deplorable, remains relatively small. In 1996, it is estimated to have been £140 million, compared with total United Kingdom duty and VAT receipts of £5,220 million for the same products—less than 3 per cent. However, we should remember that everyone can play a part in combating those illegal activities—even my hon. Friend, as he witnesses them in Calais.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Does the hon. Lady agree with the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) that the community pub and regional brewers such as Adnams, which is based in the Waveney constituency at Southwold, both form a vital part of the community?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes. I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney and I know that many people share his views.

Customs greatly values the information that it receives from the trade and members of the public. It has set up confidential telephone lines to which the public and the trade can report their suspicions. I can give the telephone number, if my hon. Friend still feels he has something to report. It is 0800 901 901. All information is gratefully received.

My hon. Friend referred to the Treasury model, but there is nothing in that model to suggest that any increase in output that might follow a cut in beer duty would be permanent. A similar, short-term result to the Treasury model could be expected from any other indirect tax cut of an equivalent scale, whether it be applied to VAT or to tobacco, betting or other alcohol duty.

The Government take the issue extremely seriously. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set up the review and why it will be reporting to me early in the new year.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Local Government Finance

1. **Mr. Miller:** If he will make a statement on his review of the mechanism of local government finance. [19393]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): We announced the review of local government finance in July, taking forward our manifesto commitments, in close collaboration with local government, business and other representative organisations. We shall shortly consult more widely on possible changes and set out our proposals on local government in a White Paper next spring.

Mr. Miller: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and assure him that the long-overdue review of local government finance is widely welcomed in my constituency. When progressing towards greater localisation of the business rate, will he take into account the views of the business community?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I can reassure my hon. Friend on that point. He will recall that, in our manifesto, we said that there were sound reasons why domestic rates should be decided locally. Any system must command the support of the business community, which is why we are consulting both the business community and local authorities about how we shall achieve that.

Mr. Yeo: As this year's local government financial settlement was clearly designed to penalise certain inner-London boroughs, as well as councils that serve rural areas and those that have prudently repaid their debt, will the Secretary of State now confirm that the aim of his review is simply to give more cash to Labour councils, no matter how incompetent or corrupt they may be?

Mr. Prescott: No, I cannot accept the conclusion drawn by the hon. Gentleman. The purpose of this Government is to be fair in determining local authority financing, and we spelt out precisely how that was so in the recent settlement which we brought to the House. I am bound to say that most local authorities have accepted our conclusions.

Mr. Barnes: There were two great Tory fiddles over local government finance when they were in government. One was the area cost adjustment and the weighting given to that figure to top-slice sums from shire counties. The other, affecting district councils in particular, was the enhanced population figures. Those meant that places such as Westminster and certain seaside resorts received excessive sums because of the people who moved into those areas; whereas areas such as north-east Derbyshire, where people had moved away for work purposes, lost out considerably. Will those matters be taken into account in the forthcoming review? I hope so.

Mr. Prescott: I can reassure my hon. Friend that that is precisely what we shall do. As I recall, during the statement on local authority financing, he mentioned a different sort of formula, which we are quite prepared to discuss with him during the review, and we await his contacting us.

New Housing (Essex)

2. **Mr. Jenkin:** What representations he has received on the need for new housing in rural Essex. [19394]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Secretary of State has received representations from the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell). Officials in the Government office for the east region hold frequent discussions with local authorities and other bodies on housing and planning issues in Essex.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman consider that an extra 45,000 houses in a handful of parliamentary constituencies that are predominantly rural represents an unwarranted intrusion of urban building into the rural area? With our roads already clogged with traffic and severe water shortages, is not what is required completely new thinking on how to deal with housing demand in the south-east, rather than sprawling estates destroying communities and our countryside?

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that has not happened in the past seven months and that some of the problems existed during the previous Administration. More important, the county council's proposals for the scale and distribution of new houses in Essex will be the subject of full public scrutiny. It is not central Government who determine those matters—they are determined at regional and local level.

Mr. Bob Russell: Will the Minister accept that Essex already has one of the highest housing densities in the country, and that the projections for the next 10 to 15 years show that that density will grow more than that of any other county, apart from Devon? Does he therefore agree that we should look to regional distribution of new housing and concentrate on urban renewal and brown-field site development, instead of continually going for green-field sites in the towns as well as the countryside?

Mr. Caborn: The Government subscribe to that general point of view, and we are working hard to achieve

those objectives. The previous Administration issued a consultation paper, and we are reflecting on the 700 responses to it. The Government will make our position clear early in the new year.

Local Government Finance

3. **Mr. Greenway:** What estimate he has made of the likely levels of council tax bills in shire districts in 1998–99. [19395]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): For the first time in four years, we have increased provision for services delivered by shire districts. I cannot predict the actual council tax levels for shire districts in 1998–99, as those will depend on the spending decisions of individual local authorities.

Mr. Greenway: Why are the Government robbing rural areas? Does the Minister realise that, if the North Yorkshire county council is to meet the Government's target for school budgets, it will be forced to spend not to standard spending assessment but to the cap limit? That will involve a 14 per cent. increase in council tax. Does that not show that the Government's claim to have funded the schools spending increase is a complete sham; and will not voters blame the Government when they get a council tax rise of four times the rate of inflation?

Ms Armstrong: This year, for, the first time, the additional money is being directly funded by central Government and has gone to every education authority. Ultimately, those decisions are local ones. It is at local level that councils will decide what quality of services they are prepared to provide for the amount that local people are prepared to pay. By contrast with last year, the additional spending on education has been provided by Government grant to local authorities.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Is the Minister aware that the shire of Northumberland faces an 18 per cent. increase—which is even worse than what the Tories gave us for 18 years? Is the Minister prepared to meet a delegation from the shire county council to discuss those matters?

Ms Armstrong: Of course I shall—or at least I shall have a meeting with all authorities that want one. We are encouraging many of them to save council tax payers' money by holding their meetings via video conferencing. That is better than making the time-consuming and costly journey to London from Northumberland.

I can assure the House that we shall hold proper discussions with authorities. I remind my hon. Friend that the money for education, including Northumberland's, has been funded directly by central Government. The previous Administration, in their spending targets for this year, included a redistribution from central to local government that would have meant an increase of 7 per cent. in council tax—but the actual amount is up to each local authority.

Sir Norman Fowler: The Minister cannot shuffle off responsibility, not even by videolink. Will she accept that the Government's settlement has discriminated against shire districts? The result will be that council tax bills will average over 10 per cent., with some councils forced to go even higher—as the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) has just pointed out. Does that not go back on Labour's promise to be fair to the shire areas?

Ms Armstrong: The shire districts have been treated more generously this year than for the previous four years, so I shall take no lessons on that from those on the Conservative Benches. I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what the Conservative party said to its members last year. In a question and answer programme, it was asked:

"Is Labour right to claim that the Chancellor is paying for national tax cuts by increasing local taxes?"

The Conservative research department answered:

"No. The Chancellor does not set local taxes: that is a job for local authorities. For its part, the Government has provided a fair settlement."

This year, an even fairer and more generous settlement has been provided. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman shouts and cries, but he knows that the previous Government delivered a poor deal for local government and we are trying, in seven months, to put right the poverty of 18 years.

Mr. Tipping: Did not the previous Government have a deliberate policy of transferring responsibility for council tax from central Government grants to local council tax payers? Will the Minister confirm that the previous Government predicted council tax increases of 7 to 8 per cent?

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Moreover, the additional money that the Government have put into education this year is equivalent to £50 protection per council tax payer, because it comes directly from central Government and the burden is not being put on council tax payers.

Kyoto Conference

4. **Mr. Brake:** If he will make a statement on the outcome of the climate change conference in Kyoto. [19396]

8. **Mr. Bayley:** If he will make a statement about Government policy on climate change. [19402]

Mr. Prescott: The Government are committed to tackling the threat of climate change, and the role that we played in securing a deal in Kyoto demonstrated that to the world. I shall make a statement to the House on the outcome of the Kyoto conference after these questions.

Mr. Brake: I welcome the fact that a statement will be made later today. However, will the Deputy Prime Minister explain how the appointment of Keith Taylor of Esso—who is on record as being extremely dismissive about global warming—to the Government's cleaner vehicles task force will help the Government achieve their 20 per cent. reduction target?

Mr. Prescott: I do not know enough about the individual referred to, but, before the Kyoto conference, we met business men at a summit at No. 10, and they made it absolutely clear that they supported the Government's objectives, wanted to talk to us after

the Kyoto agreement, and believed that, if the Government could provide leadership, they would be prepared to follow a practical policy. That is precisely what we are doing and together we shall achieve the objectives that we agreed in Kyoto.

Mr. Bayley: I pay tribute to the Deputy Prime Minister's shuttle diplomacy, without which there would have been no agreement whatever at the Kyoto conference. Does my right hon. Friend agree that rich countries such as Britain face a simple choice: pay now to cut greenhouse gas emissions; or pay later to clear up the mess of flooding in coastal areas and crop failures? Will he give the House a clear assurance that, even though other countries have not signed up to our ambitious target of a 20 per cent. reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the Labour Government will stick to that target?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's kind remarks. I shall wait for the statement to give the details to the House, but let me just say that it is not all about pain; it is about gain, making things an awful lot more efficient and making people's quality of life much better. My hon. Friend must bear in mind the fact that the developed countries produce more than 50 per cent. of greenhouse gases, and Kyoto was about making the first down payment on their contribution. It was a successful formula.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I recognise and welcome the Government's commitment to cut emissions by 20 per cent., based on 1990 figures, by 2010. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that he should come clean in another sense and tell the House precisely what additional measures he will take to ensure that that objective is reached? If he cannot do that now, will he mention it in his statement?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I shall refer to the matter in the statement later.

Local Government Finance

5. **Jane Griffiths:** What representations he has received in response to the changes in economic and social needs indices announced in the 1998–99 local government settlement. [19397]

Ms Armstrong: We have received a number of representations from local authorities and others in response to the changes in the economic and social needs indices announced in the provisional 1998–99 local government finance settlement.

Jane Griffiths: Does my hon. Friend agree that, following this year's local government settlement, the two very different shire district authorities that form part of my constituency of Reading, East—urban, Labour-controlled Reading, which has a number of social need and deprivation indicators, and suburban and semi-rural Wokingham, which has few—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—not reading—have received help with the difficult and costly transition to unitary authority status?

Ms Armstrong: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I know that different authorities have very different needs, and it is right that those needs should be properly reflected when we consider the allocation of money to those authorities. The economic and social indices used by the previous Administration were believed and trusted by no one. We have tackled that as an important part of achieving fairness this year, as can be seen in the results for Wokingham and Reading.

Mr. Boswell: Will the Minister bear in mind the need for eventual changes in the area cost adjustment, in the light of the Elliot report? Does she accept that, although we may generously allow her and the new Government a year to review the situation, by this time next year counties that do not benefit from that adjustment, such as Northamptonshire, will be looking for action?

Ms Armstrong: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman will allow me at least one year. He was prepared to allow his Government a lot longer—I know that they struggled with the area cost adjustment for every year that I have been in the House. The hon. Gentleman will know that I have announced further research into the area cost adjustment, and we shall return to the matter next year.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for the Government's generous contribution to local government in the form of education funding. Will she take note of the fact that local government care for the elderly still faces substantial need? In view of the new challenges confronting local government in looking after the elderly, when she considers the formula for 1998–99, will she give special consideration to the social needs facing many local authorities, especially my local authority, Wakefield?

Ms Armstrong: The settlement this year included a final transitional amount of £350 million for community care. Also, this year we changed the SSA for social services for the elderly. I recognised, as did my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister when he made the statement, that, although we had got a better and fairer settlement, it was a tough settlement for local government. It will take us some time to begin to catch up on the 18 years of deficit.

6. **Mr. Lansley:** When he plans to meet representatives of the Local Government Association to discuss the 1998–99 settlement. [19400]

Ms Armstrong: I am currently planning to meet them on Wednesday 14 January.

Mr. Lansley: When the Minister meets the Local Government Association, will she explain why, when the Deputy Prime Minister said that the purpose of his statement was fairness, the Government proceeded with the rampant unfairness of not implementing the changes to the area cost adjustment that were promised by the Prime Minister to the *Cambridge Evening News* in April this year before the election? Cambridgeshire has the lowest SSA per head of any shire county, and the failure to implement the review means that Cambridgeshire is not properly compensated for the cost of providing services.

Ms Armstrong: As I have already said this afternoon, there has been less agreement about, and less support across local government for, area cost adjustment than any

other single issue. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has tried to make changes this year that can be upheld properly and credibly. Those changes have general support across local government—even if individual authorities have not benefited from them.

There is no consensus or agreement regarding the area cost adjustment and the Elliot review, and we are not able to achieve that at present. Therefore, we have commissioned additional research into actual costs and we shall examine that matter, together with all other suggestions, with local government next year. We gave a commitment that we shall examine whatever changes are proposed, but those changes must be robust and must stand the test of time.

Mr. Hoyle: Can the Minister explain the concept of fairness, as Chorley is the only council in the north-west that has suffered the double blow of reductions in SSA and in revenue support grant? Could there have been a mistake? Will the Minister hold an urgent meeting with the local authority—around the table and not by video link?

Ms Armstrong: Any change always means that there are winners and, unfortunately, losers. I predicted that outcome before the settlement: it was bound to happen. I shall, of course, be happy to meet Chorley council. I am simply trying to make life easier for it and for council tax payers by suggesting a simpler method. However, we want to ensure that every authority is treated fairly within a formula and a set of formulae that achieve general agreement across local government and in this place.

Mr. Burstow: When the Minister meets the Local Government Association in January, will she take the opportunity to reassure it that the Government have no plans to ask local authorities to provide services to disabled people while scrapping the disability living allowance to pay for that?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is pushing his luck: Social Security questions were yesterday. I assume that he missed being called then. We are of course keen to work with local government and to discuss a wide range of topics with it. I am sure that the Local Government Association will bring many matters before me on 14 January.

Mr. MacShane: In her meetings with the Local Government Association, will the Minister assure the House that she will convey a message of partnership and of respect for the work of our 12,000-odd local councillors? Such an approach would be in stark contrast to that of the Conservatives, who, for 18 years, patronised, derided and sneered at them, and treated them as the enemy within. Services provided locally are a vital part of the community, and everyone—certainly those in my constituency of Rotherham—is delighted to see a Minister finally treating local government as an equal partner.

Ms Armstrong: We meet local government representatives on a regular basis because we believe that local government is a legitimate and proper democratic tier of government. It ill behoves hon. Members in this place to criticise the behaviour and activities of those at another level of government. It is important for all who believe in democracy to support local government and achieve the best service at local, as well as central, level.

Sir Norman Fowler: If the Minister believes that, will she accept that, in addition to the other costs imposed by the Government, the Chancellor's pension tax is currently costing local authorities £300 million a year? Why will the Government not tell local authorities who will bear that cost?

Ms Armstrong: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman obviously has not been able to keep up with the level of on-going negotiations between central and local government. The Local Government Association is currently conducting a survey to establish what the precise cost will be. *[Interruption.]* There is no point seeking to guess the survey's findings when they have not yet been delivered. No one in local government has yet formulated the cost. We have agreed that when that cost is known and when we are aware of the actuarial costs of the revaluation, those factors will be taken into account next year during the settlement process.

Mr. Watts: Will my hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the improvements that have been made to the standard spending assessment system this year? Will she accept also that the people of St. Helens will be laughing in the aisles to hear Conservative Members talk about fairness when their Government introduced a system that meant that Westminster, which has the same population as St. Helens, received far more grant than St. Helens? If St. Helens had received the same level of grant as Westminster, no council tax would have been levied. Indeed, we would have been able to give a £1,000 rebate to every member of the St. Helens community.

Ms Armstrong: As I have already said, the changes that we have made in the SSA this year were arrived at after full consultation with local government during the summer. It was widely accepted that changes in the economic and financial indices and those related to commuters and visitors would make the system much fairer. I accept that there is still more work to be done, but I thank my hon. Friend for his recognition that this year's settlement is much fairer and better than those arrived at in previous years.

Decentralisation

7. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** If he will make a statement on progress towards decentralisation of government within England. [19401]

Mr. Caborn: On 3 December, we published our White Paper entitled "Building Partnerships for Prosperity", which outlined our proposals for regional development agencies. We see RDAs as the first step on the way to establishing greater decentralisation of government within England.

Mr. Kennedy: As part of the regional development agencies strategy, will the Minister revisit and reconsider the future role, remit and, most important of all, the budget of the Rural Development Commission? There is a profound sense of anxiety throughout rural England

especially that, effectively, the commission is being dismantled by the Government. It is feared that the budget will not be transferred fully towards the sort of projects that benefit particularly the west country, Yorkshire and elsewhere, as under the present arrangements.

It must be said that the attitude adopted by the Deputy Prime Minister when he introduced the White Paper offered no reassurance. Will the Government revisit this issue? There is a profound sense in rural Britain that we have an urban Government with urban attitudes, who are not sensitive to the interests of rural Britain.

Mr. Caborn: First, it is unfortunate that, obviously, the hon. Gentleman has not read the White Paper and the Bill. Secondly, I do not know where he is obtaining his information. I say that in response to the White Paper on rural communities. Furthermore, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has announced that we are bringing forward a comprehensive spending review of the rural areas. Discussion is starting, and that will give reassurance to the rural communities that they will have a far better deal than they would have received under the fragmented arrangements that were operating over the past decade or more.

Mr. Blizzard: Will my hon. Friend give guidance and direction to regional development agencies so that they might address disparities within regions? For example, East Anglia is often seen as a relatively prosperous region, yet, within it, especially Lowestoft in my constituency, there are high and sustained levels of unemployment. There are levels of deprivation that have been described by the director of public health as being comparable to those of inner cities. There are large areas of derelict industrial land which are in need of regeneration. Will my hon. Friend ask regional development agencies to take up those problems?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend knows that the object of the exercise is to decentralise power from the centre down to the regions. We have made it clear that decentralisation must take place also within the regions. Overheating of some parts of the economy and under-utilisation in other parts is unacceptable and is an economic model that was left by the previous Administration. The result was that only two of the 10 English regions achieved the European average of gross domestic product per capita. Only two regions marginally reached the average. By definition, eight regions were well behind. Cornwall achieved only 69 per cent. of GDP per capita. That is the legacy of the past 18 years of Tory government.

Mr. Townend: Does the Minister accept that where I come from—East Yorkshire—there is no demand for another tier of government, no demand for a regional assembly and no demand for the extra bureaucrats and politicians who will have to be paid for by the taxpayer? The people of East Yorkshire do not want to be run from Leeds or, even worse, from Manchester.

Mr. Caborn: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman goes back and discusses it with some of his colleagues in the Conservative party in the north, because they are very active members of the Yorkshire assembly. Led by the Conservatives, and with the Liberals and the Labour party, they have formed a Yorkshire assembly. I suggest that he gets in touch with the grass roots of his party.

Rail Fares

28. **Ann Clwyd:** If he will make a statement about the regulation of fare levels for rail passengers. [19423]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): Fares regulation is a matter for the franchising director. The current requirements are set out in the director's contracts with the train operating companies. We intend to establish a national rail authority which will take over the functions of the franchising director and develop the network as part of our integrated transport policy.

Ann Clwyd: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that with cut-price air fares it is now possible to fly the Atlantic for the same price as going by rail to Pembroke? And why does a train ticket last for only one month when a return air ticket lasts for three months?

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend raises a number of important points. If we are to get more people to travel by rail, which is our objective, fares are an important factor. The duration of rail tickets is also a matter that should be considered.

Mr. Ottaway: Does the Minister agree that the success of the privatised railways represents the best way of getting passengers off the roads? *[Interruption.]* Wait for it. Is the Minister aware that the cheapest return ticket to Liverpool is £19? That is half the cost of a car journey. By holding their fares at less than inflation, the railways have seen a 7 per cent. increase in passenger use since privatisation. Is it not ironic that the only bit of railway line that the Government control—London Underground—is the only one which has seen a fare increase above inflation? What does that say to the travelling public?

Dr. Strang: I do not think that the British people will recognise the hon. Gentleman's description of the privatised and fragmented railway that the Labour Government inherited. That is why we are determined to set up a national rail authority and to achieve effective regulation so that the taxpayer gets value for money.

Mr. Pike: Is it not a fact that as a result of the fragmentation of the railway system passengers are very often not offered the cheapest rail ticket for their journey? Do we not need greater regulation to ensure that passengers get the best possible value and are offered the cheapest possible ticket when they go to buy one?

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He will be aware that a recent survey showed that as many as one in 10 people are not given accurate information when they seek information about a journey, the best way to travel or the price. We need to address that. It is vital, especially now that we have one telephone number for national rail inquiries, that people are given proper information when they inquire.

Transport Policy

29. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** If he will make a statement on the contribution of transport policy to the *(a)* Government's carbon dioxide reduction targets and *(b)* the Government's commitments made at the Kyoto conference. [19424]

Mr. Prescott: As the Kyoto negotiations have now been completed, I shall be making a statement shortly.

Mr. Taylor: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that "In Trust for Tomorrow" promised a detailed environmental statement on the Government's new legislation and major policy announcements? As the Government's White Paper on transport will be vital to their strategy, will he ensure that there is an assessment of its impact, including a carbon budget, so that we can judge how the policies are intended to meet the Government's carbon dioxide reduction target?

Mr. Prescott: Yes.

A34 (Noise Pollution)

30. **Dr. Harris:** What representations he has received on the noise pollution caused by the surface of the A34 passing by Gosford, Watereaton, Islip and Kidlington; and if he will make a statement. [19425]

Dr. Strang: I have received numerous representations requesting that this section of road be resurfaced to reduce traffic noise. Traffic noise is one of the issues being addressed by the wide-ranging transport review that we are undertaking at present.

Dr. Harris: Will the Minister consider holding a meeting with me and others to discuss the measures necessary to reduce noise on that road? Does he agree that one reason why the surface is the noisiest in Britain is the use of too-deep brushing for surfacing, which was recognised as a problem but not legislated against when the road was built?

Dr. Strang: The level of noise is certainly greater than was predicted by the Transport Research Laboratory when the road was built, but the hon. Gentleman will understand that serious traffic noise occurs in many other parts of the country. However, if he would like to discuss the matter with me I shall be delighted to see him.

Bridges and Trunk Roads

31. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** What is his Department's policy towards the maintenance of bridges and trunk roads; and if he will make a statement. [19426]

Dr. Strang: Our priority is to maintain public safety through a cost-effective programme of capital maintenance, to provide an effective, reliable and environmentally acceptable trunk road network.

Later this afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be announcing the Department's spending plans for next year. They will include a substantial increase in money available for the maintenance of the trunk road network.

Mr. Robertson: I remind the Minister that it is extremely important to maintain bridges. I understand that Gloucestershire is bidding for help to strengthen its bridges and that failure to provide such help will lead to the imposition of weight restrictions and great disruption, not only around those areas but to the local economies. Will the right hon. Gentleman take that into account?

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. As he is aware, we are due to accept the heavier lorries on 1 January 1999, so it is vital that the bridges are up to strength. I can assure him that the Government are determined to achieve that for the bridges on the trunk road network.

Mr. Hope: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the national road condition survey showed a deterioration in the condition of motorways and trunk roads in 1996? Does he agree that his Tory predecessors failed to give sufficient priority to expenditure to maintain the condition of the motorway and trunk road network?

Dr. Strang: Yes, I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend and I am grateful to him for raising that. We inherited a neglected maintenance programme and we are putting that right. Conservative Members must understand that the neglect of road maintenance means that in the long run more money is paid out because one has to pay for the corrective work and for the overall maintenance as well.

Mr. Chope: The right hon. Gentleman is not right to say that road maintenance was neglected by the previous Government. At the beginning of this year, a report confirmed that the condition of the road network had improved significantly under the Conservative Government. Where is the right hon. Gentleman getting the extra money to invest further in road maintenance? Is it at the expense of other Department of Transport programmes? He has made much of the fact that he inherited a budget from the previous Government which gives him no flexibility, but he seems by his announcement to be saying that he has found some flexibility. I should like to know at whose expense.

Dr. Strang: I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that our approach is no longer automatically to build new roads. The challenge is to use our existing road space and road network more effectively. That is why we are determined to improve maintenance.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's first point, I suggest that he reads the evidence given to the Select Committee about a year ago, when the then Minister for Railways and Roads admitted that the Government were failing to maintain the trunk road network adequately and, furthermore, that the Government had failed to provide adequate money for the maintenance of the network. That is why we have so substantially increased it, as the hon. Gentleman will see later this afternoon.

Railway Inspectorate

32. **Mr. Alasdair Morgan:** What recent discussions he has had with the railway inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive. [19427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport and I met the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive officials, including the chief inspector of railways, on 16 October. We made it clear that the Government look to the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, as the railway safety regulators, to ensure that safety standards are maintained and, indeed, improved.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister agree that railways in Britain have some of the highest safety standards in the world? Is she aware of the remark made by the chief inspector of railways that if the railway companies were allowed to do what they wanted, safety standards would go down? Will she take steps to ensure that they are not allowed to do what they want?

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. This issue was highlighted in the Health and Safety Executive's most recent report, which fired a warning shot across the bows of railway companies, saying that they must not put commercial considerations ahead of safety. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport made it clear in his response to the Health and Safety Executive's report that the Government share and endorse that view.

Mrs. Dunwoody: We welcome that assurance. Will the Minister examine closely an excellent ten-minute Bill introduced in the House not long ago which proposed a national authority for transport safety, with the right of individuals to make known any breaches of safety at any level in any transport authority and to have them investigated?

Ms Jackson: I was privileged to be in the House when that ten-minute Bill was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) with her usual perspicacity, wit, information and intelligence. The Government's approach to safety has less to do with structures than with vital regulation, regardless of mode, which we believe will ensure safety. Existing safety structures allow individuals to raise their concerns if they perceive a lapse or deterioration in safety.

Sir Norman Fowler: Perhaps I may intervene in this love-in for 30 seconds. Will the Minister confirm that railways remain one of the safest ways of travel in this country and that there is no evidence privatisation has led to a reduction in safety standards? If we want more people to travel by rail—as I assume everyone does—we should emphasis that achievement and not snipe at it.

Ms Jackson: I trust that the right hon. Gentleman's opening remark was not touched with a tinge of the green-eyed monster. If he wishes to be part of a love-in, I am sure that arrangements can be made.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct in saying that the safety standard of railways as a means of surface transport is very high, but it would be wrong for this or any other Government to ignore what the Health and Safety Executive said in its most recent report. I repeat that it fired a shot across the bows of the privatised companies and highlighted the fact that they must not sacrifice safety standards for what may seem to them to be a short-term financial advantage. The Government strongly endorse and support that approach.

Mr. Snape: Does my hon. Friend accept that I possess none of the virtues attributed to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)? Does she also accept that the railways inspectorate has for many years commanded the respect of all those involved in the railway industry? Will she ensure that in future legal involvement in railway accidents follows rather than precedes the inspectorate's report? The less legal involvement early on in a railway inquiry, the more likely we are to find the truth behind those accidents.

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend somewhat disappoints me. I had intended to say that I was second to none in my admiration for the contributions—based on expertise and experience—that he inevitably and invariably makes to debates on this subject. I hear what he says, but I am sure he would agree that although there are very few serious accidents on our railways, on occasion the police, for example, are involved in the resulting examination. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend makes a valid point and, as always, we shall give due consideration to what he has said.

Road Infrastructure Improvements

33. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** If he will make a statement on the improvements that his Department assesses to be required in the trunk road and motorway infrastructure. [19428]

Dr. Strang: Future improvements to the trunk road network are being considered in the roads review, which is part of the integrated transport policy review.

Mr. Winterton: I think that everyone accepts that an integrated transport policy is of the greatest importance to the country, not only environmentally but in respect of value for money. Does the Minister accept, however, that trunk road and motorway improvement projects are vital to the on-going economic success of the country? In my constituency, the Macclesfield to Poynton A523 improvement, the Poynton bypass and the Manchester airport link roads east and west must be constructed if we are to minimise the impact on my area of the expansion of Manchester airport—especially the building of the second runway, which I have warmly supported.

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman has been an assiduous advocate of the case for the road schemes that he mentions. As he will understand, they are all being considered as part of the roads review. As for his wider point, of course more investment in roads is needed, as is some further road building, but the Government's approach is no longer to opt automatically for a road solution. We must look at other options and, where appropriate, give consideration to public transport and more effective traffic management.

Mr. Stevenson: In considering what improvements are necessary to the trunk road system, will my right hon. Friend note that the regulations governing compensation claims for businesses and properties, and the noise

insulation regulations, are now outdated and anomalous and certainly do not reflect the justifiable claims of those whose properties are affected by trunk road building? As part of the reassessment, will my right hon. Friend consider the anomalies, and the serious misgivings that many of us have, and report back as soon as possible?

Dr. Strang: I know that my hon. Friend has taken a particular interest in the matter. He feels that adequate compensation has not been paid following the building of a road in his constituency. We shall continue to consider the matter, and I will take what he has said fully into account.

Hammersmith Bridge

34. **Dr. Tonge:** What progress has been made on plans for reopening Hammersmith bridge; and if he will make a statement. [19429]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is responsible for progressing plans for reopening Hammersmith bridge. I understand that the repairs are programmed for completion by the end of summer 1999 and that while the works are in hand the borough intends to initiate discussions on the future use of the bridge.

Dr. Tonge: Is the Minister aware that the closure of Hammersmith bridge has acted as a catalyst in making people move out of their cars and on to public transport? Is she aware that the provision of public transport over the bridge is woefully inadequate? Does she accept that it would be worth helping London Transport to cope with the demand from the general public for bus services because in general that would be a very good way of encouraging people to get out of their cars and thus reduce the amount of road traffic?

Ms Jackson: The hon. Lady makes a valid point, which is borne out by experience. I understand that while the bridge has been closed to private vehicles bus patronage has increased by nearly 17 per cent. The number of buses per hour increased by almost 6 per cent. She may be interested to know that Hammersmith and Fulham borough is consulting even internationally on whether the bridge should, post repair, maintain the present system or be returned to carrying all vehicles up to 7.5 tonnes. I understand that these questions are appearing on the internet.

London Underground

35. **Mrs. Laing:** What assessment he has made of the effect of the continuing public ownership of London Underground on its ability to attract adequate private capital. [19430]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are urgently assessing how a public-private partnership can attract private capital for the Underground. We wish to harness private finance and skills and build on the Underground's public service record.

Mrs. Laing: Is the Minister aware that my constituents in Epping Forest will be disappointed to hear that the Government's plans to improve the London Underground, on which my constituents depend, are again being reviewed and delayed? There was laughter from Labour Members earlier when the success of rail privatisation was mentioned, but although the Government have the power to reverse the previous Government's railway privatisation they have not done so. Does that not implicitly tell us that the Government have changed their policies and their principles in relation to the railways, as they have on many other policies and principles that they held before the general election? Given that that is true—*[Interruption.]* Given that that is true, why will they not give up their dogma in relation to the Underground? [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] Why will the Government not admit that privatisation is the only way to raise the amount of capital needed for the London Underground? Privatisation is what my constituents want.

Ms Jackson: I can only assume that the hon. Lady's injury has caused a fever to her brain and that she is confusing the actions of the previous Administration with those of this Government. We have made it abundantly clear that we do not intend to have a wholesale privatisation of the Underground. We are dealing with surface rail as we find it, and we are committed to ensuring that the more than £2 billion of taxpayers' money that goes into our railways produces a high quality service.

Thames Watermen

36. **Mr. Efford:** What representations he has received on behalf of Thames watermen regarding unlicensed individuals employed on the Thames. [19431]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have not received any representations about the use of unlicensed watermen on the Thames. The licensing of watermen on the Thames is a matter for the Port of London authority.

Mr. Efford: I thank my hon. Friend for the answer. Is she aware that Thames watermen undergo a five-year apprenticeship to qualify to pilot boats on the Thames? Does she accept that safety on the Thames should be a central part of any regeneration in that aspect of London? Will she therefore accept that Thames watermen who are licensed and qualified to pilot boats on the Thames and who are currently unemployed have a legitimate argument in asking the Port of London authority to address the fact that unlicensed individuals are taking their work away from them? Will she bear that in mind in any future discussions with the authority?

Ms Jackson: I have no information that the jobs of licensed watermen are being taken away by unlicensed individuals, which I understand would contravene the byelaws that govern the Port of London authority. If my hon. Friend would care to furnish precise details, I shall be happy to examine the position.

Mr. Robathan: I know that the Minister and the Secretary of State are keen to encourage the use of the Thames. Will she therefore resist the plea to perpetuate that most extraordinary closed shop,

the five-year training scheme, and try to introduce training schemes that mean that people can pilot boats on the Thames safely but much more quickly than by taking part in the five-year training scheme—the old closed shop from old Labour?

Ms Jackson: I find it quite extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman should propose an expansion of use of the Thames, be it for pleasure or for transport, without ensuring that those responsible for carrying people on the river are properly trained and that safety standards are in no wise eroded. That is a further demonstration of what the Government have long argued—that the Conservative party had no commitment whatever to education and training to ensure this country's competitive edge in an international market.

Rail Freight

37. **Sir Robert Smith:** What action he is taking to increase the proportion of freight transported by rail. [19432]

Dr. Strang: We aim to increase the amount of freight carried by rail. We have already taken action to boost the take-up of freight grants and we are working to get a better deal for Railfreight through the channel tunnel.

The House may like to know that tomorrow I shall be opening a new freight spur to Manchester airport which will mean that the bulk of the materials for the new runway will be carried by rail.

Sir Robert Smith: In trying to encourage more freight on to the railways, is the Minister concerned that brand new class 92 locomotives are lying idle in sidings because they do not have a safety case to travel north of Wembley? What action are the Government taking to try to ensure that that does not persist and that the class 92 locomotives go north of Wembley?

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I am sure that he is not suggesting, however, that safety is not an overriding priority. In terms of his constituency, the prospects for increased rail freight are most exciting. The distance to the channel tunnel and the investment that is taking place mean that we can look forward to a significant increase in the amount of material that is taken by rail, particularly from northern Scotland.

Kyoto Summit

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the outcome of the United Nations conference on climate change, which I attended last week in Kyoto, Japan, along with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment.

Man-made climate change is the greatest environmental threat facing the world today. In the United Kingdom, we have suffered record drought for the past two and a half years. This year, the world experienced the highest average temperatures that have ever been recorded. Terrible floods have engulfed central Europe, and droughts and storms have followed this year's El Niño. Forest fires have caused deadly pollution in south-east Asia and Australia. Our polar ice caps are melting, and only this weekend Mexico was hit by freak snowstorms.

Already, our sea levels are rising as ocean temperatures increase and the waters expand. If that continues, some island communities will disappear into the sea. A third of the world's population lives within 40 miles of the coast. Whole swathes of Britain's east coast could fall victim to rising sea levels.

The human race risks playing havoc with the world's weather systems. Unless we act now, we shall be condemning our children to a world of drought and crop failures, rising seas, mass migration and spreading disease. Nature is no respecter of boundaries. This is a global problem demanding a global solution, and the very justification for the Kyoto conference.

The main purpose of the Kyoto conference was for the developed countries to set legally binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2010. Success was by no means certain. Consensus had to be achieved among 160 different nations, and the conference started with the major players poles apart. The European Union proposed a 15 per cent. cut; Japan a 2.5 per cent. cut; and the United States proposal was for a zero cut.

After long and gruelling negotiations, the protocol was agreed on Thursday morning, and will be open for signature in March. For the first time, developed countries, which account for over half the world's greenhouse gas emissions, will commit themselves to legally binding targets. The agreement will produce a cut of more than 5 per cent. in their emissions below 1990 levels by 2010.

I said before negotiations began that political will would be needed to deliver a successful agreement. The outcome of hard negotiations was that America moved from zero to a cut of 7 per cent.; Japan moved from a cut of 2.5 per cent. to 6 per cent.; and the European Union set the top standard with a cut of 8 per cent., a standard which was adopted by a total of 26 countries. The outcome demonstrated beyond doubt that genuine political will did exist in all those countries, and a political breakthrough was achieved. I have placed in the Library a full copy of the Kyoto protocol, which lists the figures for each country.

In four to five years' time, there will be a chance to review and, if possible, to improve the targets. The targets will cover the six main greenhouse gases, not only carbon dioxide. The protocol also provides a number of measures that will help countries to achieve their targets. The measures include the possibility of trading in permits for greenhouse gas emissions; limited allowances for absorption of carbon dioxide by forests, which act as so-called "carbon sinks"; and provision for developed countries to gain credit by helping developing countries curb their emissions.

Fears—genuine fears—were expressed that those provisions might amount to loopholes in the agreement. That is why we, the United Kingdom, proposed the concept of a "window of credibility" for countries to demonstrate their firm commitment to the agreement; and it is why the European Union insisted that clear rules for all the provisions must be developed over the next two years or so.

The conference fully recognised that the developed world must take the lead in curbing global warming. It is now necessary to discuss how developing countries can become more involved in the commitment to that process. That is necessary for long-term success in tackling global warming.

The United Kingdom played a major role in ensuring that Kyoto was successful. I pay tribute to my predecessor as Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), for the part that he played in agreeing the Berlin mandate in 1995, which set the parameters for Kyoto. He was, indeed, a member of the United Kingdom delegation.

The Government have demonstrated at the highest levels their commitment to environmental issues. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister highlighted climate change at the G8 summit in Denver, at the Earth summit in New York, and at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has put the environment at the heart of his foreign policy and worked for the successful conclusion at Kyoto. At the request of the Japanese hosts, I myself chaired the meeting of the developed countries that was held last month in Tokyo. In the run-up to Kyoto, I met the leaders of a number of developed and developing countries.

I should like to praise the efforts of the Prime Minister himself, who was in telephone contact with other world leaders to secure the final agreement. I should like also to thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, who played a key role with our European partners. Finally, the agreement would not have been achieved without the sheer professionalism and commitment of British civil servants. It was a really strong British team effort within a powerful European contribution.

We must turn our minds now to implementation. The United Kingdom will assume the European Union presidency at a crucial stage. Over the next six months, we need to agree how the European target of an 8 per cent. reduction will be shared out among member states; policies and measures at a European level to help achieve those targets; and the European position on rules for the various issues that I mentioned. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment is today discussing those very matters at the Environment Council in Brussels.

Previously, the European Union had agreed proposals to achieve an average 10 per cent. cut in emissions. There were different contributions from different member states.

Germany, for example, agreed a minus 25 per cent. target, whereas Portugal agreed a 40 per cent. increase. We need to renegotiate those figures in the light of the outcome of Kyoto. We shall not be certain of the legal target applying to the United Kingdom until that share-out has been determined. We shall, of course, accept our legal obligation as our first priority, but shall still work for our aim of 20 per cent., as set out in our manifesto.

We are already working on plans to achieve our targets, taking into account the outcome of Kyoto. Next year, we shall publish a consultation document. In setting out our programme, we shall consult widely—particularly industry, local authorities and environmental groups, which will all have key roles to play in delivering the reductions. I reassure industry—as the Prime Minister did at our business summit—that we shall not take any unilateral measures that will unduly damage UK competitiveness.

Tackling climate change is about opportunity and gain, not pain. It goes hand in hand with building a better, more modern and affluent Britain. It is about improving transport systems in a way that will give us a better quality of life and cleaner cities; improving the housing stock, which will give us warmer, more comfortable homes and tackle fuel poverty; using less energy in a way that will make our industries more efficient; and ensuring that the UK is at the forefront of the world environmental technology market so that we can create new jobs and business opportunities. It is good for the environment, good for the economy, good for people and good for jobs.

I believe that Kyoto will be remembered as the place where the world, in a United Nations forum, faced a crucial decision and made the right choice. Failure, which many had predicted, would have condemned future generations to untold misery and disaster. We have taken the first, but only the first, crucial step to curbing climate change. There is still much to be done, but I am certainly proud of the role that the United Kingdom has played in this achievement.

We do not own this world; we hold it in trust, to hand on to our children's children. We owe it to them to build on the Kyoto agreement to safeguard their future.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I welcome the fact that there was an agreement in Kyoto last week because, surely, that reflects a growing acceptance by national Governments that international action is needed to tackle the problem of climate change. I endorse what the Secretary of State said about my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and his contribution.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will recognise that the agreement is a long way short of the objectives stated by the Government and the European Union, and that that has led to disappointment being expressed by bodies such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature. Against that background may I ask the right hon. Gentleman some short questions?

The right hon. Gentleman has confirmed that the Government still intend to aim for a 20 per cent. reduction in emissions by 2010. Will he say more about the exact policies by which that target will be reached? How will he ensure that industry, for example, is not disadvantaged because Britain is aiming for a more stringent target than other developed countries? Will he confirm that any increase in green taxes will be compensated for by tax reductions elsewhere and that green taxes will not be seen simply and exclusively as a general revenue raiser?

On emissions trading, what safeguards and checks are there to ensure that countries taking credit for emission reductions have actually achieved those reductions rather than their having been brought about because of temporary industrial depression in a particular economy? If we are to cut carbon dioxide emissions, that will involve planning policies aimed at preventing as many people as possible from having to make long commuting journeys into work. Is not that another reason why we should do all we can to preserve the green belt in this country and put energy and resources into developing the brown-field sites in our towns and cities?

Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House—he touched on this—how Britain intends to use its presidency of the European Union and exactly what policies and measures he intends to propose for the detailed implementation of the Kyoto agreement? *[Interruption.]* I hope that the Minister for London and Construction realises that we are seeking to be constructive.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that on both sides of the House, with the exception of the Minister for London and Construction, the importance of making urgent progress is recognised and fully shared?

Mr. Prescott: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the agreement. I think that both sides of the House will endorse that. It was important to get an agreement on legal targets, and establishing that legal framework was probably the main contribution of the conference. Most of the environmental non-governmental organisations have made that sound point. It is a first step and no more, but it is an important first step. It is right to call it historic.

The right hon. Gentleman asked how we intend to achieve our aim of a 20 per cent. reduction. I made it clear in my statement that that is a target which we set for ourselves and that it was not dependent on Kyoto. We have already embarked on the policy changes necessary to achieve that. Indeed, the Government's scientific advisers have told us that it is possible and we have already produced the first paper for the Cabinet Committee, to show how that can be done. Methods include improving renewables and an integrated transport system—all of which will involve Government statements and a new planning framework.

I am pleased that planning is no longer an ideological issue of dispute between the two parties. Planning is essential if there are to be positive targets for industry to achieve. That point was made by representatives of business when they met my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister; they wanted practical targets, and we agree. We hope to produce a statement on that subject as a beginning next year. We shall consider what happens in the negotiations that take place in Europe, based on the legal targets and Europe's legal commitments.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that he will make more statements about the taxation framework in the Budget—he also made that clear in the recently published Green Paper. Taxes will play a part in the process, just as fuel duties did under the previous Administration.

[Mr. Prescott]

Trading emissions are a matter of concern. It became clear to me, as I toured various parts of the world and talked to leaders, that each country had conditions relating to how it would achieve the target. New Zealand's conditions involve forests; Australia's involve land clearance; America's involve trading emissions and the new funding arrangements for using credits. In those circumstances, it was clear that no agreement could be achieved on that subject within the negotiating period at Kyoto.

The Americans had also made it clear that Congress would not endorse the target unless the developing countries signed up, which meant that there had to be a further period within which the rules could be worked out. It was important that the measures should not be seen as loopholes—the agreement's credibility very much depends on that. I do not believe that the American Congress will endorse the agreement unless the rules are worked out. There will be an opportunity for people to sign up in March and agree a period for ratification—some three or four years from now, after the presidential elections, when we can work out all the details.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) is right to say that the agreement's credibility is very much linked to flexibility. That is why we shall use our European presidency, which begins in January, and our leadership of the G8 countries, which meet here in the next six months, to place on the agenda—as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been doing—environmental issues and how we sort out the rules, what the rules are and whether we can bring the experts together quickly. We are rightly considering those issues as a matter of priority. I hope that our policy enjoys the full support of the House, as it is necessary, and I welcome the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield's words of support.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment on all their hard work during the negotiations. When will the treaty begin to work? What are the prospects of the United States ratifying it? What mechanism is there for the process to be reviewed, particularly if the evidence of climate change gets worse and public opinion around the world demands faster action than was originally agreed?

Mr. Prescott: Those are essential questions and I thank my hon. Friend for his words of support, particularly as he is the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, which will have an opportunity to question us further in future. We have placed the protocol in the Library. The conference is likely to be called within four years, but within 12 months I believe that a conference will be called—I am afraid that the country's name has slipped out of my mind.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): It will be in Buenos Aires.

Mr. Prescott: Buenos Aires—I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That conference will be called within 12 months, and we can begin to assess how far the agreements have gone, what we have done about the details and the rules that will apply—that is equally as important as the legal targets that were achieved at Kyoto.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister will agree that there was a risk of the process collapsing, and I join others in welcoming the agreement that was secured in those circumstances. Nevertheless, the net outcome of the figures agreed is that global warming will continue to worsen and the agreement will not reverse the position. Further action therefore needs to be taken to secure a tighter international agreement.

Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government will stick by their manifesto commitment to a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, although the agreement is about a basket of gases? Will he explain what he means by saying that the priority will be the legal obligation rather than the UK Government's target of a 20 per cent. cut? It is not clear how that figure will be met if the concentration is on a much lower figure.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister work with the Prime Minister to use the EU presidency to ensure that the EU sticks, at the minimum, to its current 10 per cent. reduction policy—and ideally, with the 15 per cent. cut that it offered—rather than simply reverting to the legal obligation of 8 per cent., which would be a step back for the European Union as a whole?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his words of support. He is right to say that the legal obligation is neither as ambitious an achievement as many of us would have wanted nor as ambitious as the European target of a 10 per cent. cut or the hoped-for 15 per cent. cut. The conference was, however, about getting 160 nations to agree. The hon. Gentleman may know that the conference could not settle its differences by voting; everything had to be done by consensus, which made matters far more difficult.

The real point is the net reduction of greenhouse gases. The reduction in greenhouse gases by developed countries—only the developed countries have agreed to such a reduction—is more than 5 per cent. That is a considerable achievement; most people predicted a far lower figure. The hon. Gentleman is, however, right to point out that greenhouse gas emissions also come from developing countries. They were not prepared—indeed, this was part of the Berlin mandate—to sign up to reductions. They made it clear that they wanted the major polluters to sign an agreement and that they would then make their decision. The ball is now in their court. If we want a real global solution, we have to get everyone in it, not just the developed countries, and that will make a real contribution.

People will begin to see that many opportunities can come from the changes involved in meeting the targets. That will encourage them to go further and to set even more stringent targets. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the first set of targets under the Montreal protocol was easily achieved, and that the countries involved met again and set further targets. That is a useful example to us; we must get on with the job.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about countries having targets different from the legal ones. It is our responsibility to observe our legal targets before the

voluntary ones. We have not, however, waited for the legal target. We are setting a target of 20 per cent., as we promised, and we are already implementing the programme to achieve that. We are advised by Government scientists that that target is possible, and that is why we made our commitment.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, in Europe we have to negotiate changes internally in what is known as the European bubble. Reductions in greenhouse gases—six rather than three are considered under the new protocol—will affect countries such as Germany, which will want to renegotiate its position. We shall have to consider the differential targets within that framework. That will be a consideration for us to bear in mind, but at the moment, as is our commitment, we are working on the 20 per cent. target as well as recognising our legal target. If other European countries are prepared to join us in having not only the legal target of 8 per cent. but a higher one, they will, once again, be joining Britain, which has set the lead. We hope to encourage Europe to come that one step further with us.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he is engaged in an almost insoluble problem? Most countries do not operate on an interventionist basis. In fact, most of the problems of global warming and all the rest of it have come about simply as a result of the use of market forces and businesses' freedom to do as they like.

I believe that the problem can be solved only be intervention, red tape and regulation, which is totally contrary to the views of Conservative Members and, indeed, those of Liberal Democrat Members. I wish my right hon. Friend well, but I believe that he knows as well as I do that without proper intervention by every country and without every country acknowledging the need to do something as opposed to uttering abstract statements, the Kyoto conference will be like Rio and many before it.

Mr. Prescott: I certainly hope that that is not the case and that it is in our hands to do something about it. The more united we are in achieving those objectives, the better.

Like my hon. Friend, I welcome the fact that planning, intervention and targets are part of an intelligent and rational approach to the problem, but I also have to recognise that, as the Americans would be quick to point out, trading emissions is an area in which there can be an element of market trading without the involvement of massive bureaucracy. I am quite prepared to consider that, given that I know that it worked quite well in America in respect of sulphur emissions. It may be a possibility—I do not know. We shall have to look at the rules, but I am prepared to keep an open mind on those matters, as long as we achieve the reduction in greenhouse gases that we all want. If we do not achieve that, we shall continue toward the disasters predicted by our scientists, which will result from the climate change brought about by ever increasing amounts of greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and congratulate him on his success. Does he agree that we ought to congratulate the officials, who became very important to the whole European Community, on the work that they have done?

Can the right hon. Gentleman help me on two matters? First, would he be willing, over the next year and with the developing countries, to seek a means of creating a system of convergence that recognises that, if in the end we have to share out the emissions that are possible, we shall have to share them out on a fair basis at some point in the next century? We need to start working on that before Buenos Aires. Secondly, would he be willing to bring into his office representatives of American-owned companies in this country, such as Vauxhall or Esso, to see whether we can exert some pressure on the mother companies in the United States, which have taken so strong a view against doing something about global warming? British companies operating in the United States, such as Shell, might well play a part in that effort, if the right hon. Gentleman were willing to take that as one of the issues on which we could get some progress.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his words of support. Just before he entered the Chamber, I had paid proper tribute to the civil servants, who were absolutely brilliant in assisting in our bringing about the agreement, but one cannot say too much. Both the right hon. Gentleman and I would agree on our tremendous admiration for the ambassador who chaired the conference, who actually achieved the agreement. He was quite remarkable and, in my view, the agreement would not have been achieved without his ability to get 160 nations to come together on an issue on which there were very difficult differences between countries. I certainly want to make it clear that his contribution was very considerable indeed.

I agree with my right hon. Member—with the hon. Friend; forgive me, the niceties of the House are lost on me from time to time. As long as you understand the point, Madam Speaker, and I am sure my hon. Member—*[Laughter.]* Yes, why do I not say it? He was a right hon. Friend over there—he joined in a British cause to do something about the environment and, as I said, his record shows his commitment to that cause.

We have to move on from here and ask how to achieve the settlement. The British presidency gives us a great opportunity, as does leadership within the G8. There was some small criticism of Russia's contribution, but there is a chance for Russia to reconsider its position. It was hoped that Russia would have had a reduction, but it did not achieve that. If it had settled for the minus 5 per cent. recommended by the conference, we would have had an even more substantial contribution. It is now time for us to talk to all parties and ask, "Do you think that you can make a better contribution than you do at the moment?" I am sure that the G8 gives us an opportunity to open up that debate. We shall now start those discussions, to make sure that we can do even better than we do at the moment.

As for the criteria that will be used to monitor emissions, they clearly need to be fair. If they are not, we shall lose credibility; if there appear to be loopholes, people will feel that the whole possibility of agreement has been undermined by failure to secure fair means and rules, not only for emissions trading, but for carbon sinks and all the other flexible areas in the agreement. We shall do our utmost to ensure that they live up to the standards that we set at Kyoto.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on

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all his work, but do I take it from what he has said that the mechanism for policing the buying and selling of emissions is not likely to be put in place until the meeting in Argentina next year?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I hope that, through our presidency and other means available to us—we must not underestimate the contribution by the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, which suggested that more could be done between developed and developing countries—we shall work on that formula. We shall not wait until that conference; indeed, I hope that, in the 12 months before then, we shall work out the principles and details needed to make a start on getting a fair agreement, especially in respect of the rules affecting emissions.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's statement, and the fact that he is pressing ahead towards a 20 per cent. reduction. Did the 15 per cent. represent an original bargaining position on the part of the European Union, so that Europe could pride itself on the 8 per cent., which went beyond what the other countries wanted? Had the average of 10 per cent. already been worked out? Is there not a place for moral leadership by Europe in this matter? As it is alleged that the United Kingdom's emission reductions have coincided with the decline of our coal industry, is the right hon. Gentleman confident that we can reach the targets that we are setting ourselves?

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I believe that the 8 per cent. does represent moral leadership; indeed, we tried to press the others to go for a higher figure. Bearing in mind the fact that the Americans had to travel from zero to 7 per cent., that represented quite an effort. There was never any question of the Americans agreeing to Europe's 15 per cent. That figure was a target to aim at. The European Union had gone for 10 per cent., as many of the negotiators were well aware. They were also well aware of Europe's bubble principle, allowing for distinctions to be made within the bubble. That gave rise to a number of difficult arguments during the negotiations.

Europe still has the chance to hold the moral high ground. We started from the position that there should be parity between Japan, America and ourselves, but it was clear that Japan would go no further than 6 per cent., while the Americans were prepared to go to 7 per cent. We went one step further, to 8 per cent. If we had gone any lower, quite a number of countries would have been prepared to go down to our level, and any agreement on net emissions would have been a failure.

We can continue to argue with other countries. There is no reason why we cannot set a target higher than the legal one, and use that as a means of pushing and shoving some of these other countries to agreeing to increase their targets beyond the legal targets as well. Europe must lead the way. As the measurement is given in terms of the proportion of the targets that is reached, one can assume that Europe has already given a greater lead than America—although we still welcome the overall agreement.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that this country would be greatly assisted in meeting its targets if, in addition to consulting local authorities and environmental groups, he were to consult in due course the proposed regional development agencies and regional chambers, so that their contribution could be considered in matters such as the integration of public transport and the production and manufacture of environmentally beneficial technology for industry?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The regional development agencies will play their part in the greening of the United Kingdom and in encouraging companies to take advantage of the technology that will arise in response to the environmental changes necessary to meet the targets. This is about gain, not pain. As other countries have done, we should recognise the advantages of the process—we have yet to grasp the full potential of the changes.

We shall talk to the local authorities and environmental groups. The regional development agencies will play their part in setting regional priorities for integrated transport systems, and in the regional planning framework—deciding where industry and housing are to be located, for instance. Determining how people move from A to B can make a significant contribution to controlling greenhouse gases.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that in our zeal to improve the environment, we should not imperil our domestic industries in favour of those of other countries that will not share his degree of commitment? Does he further agree that, far from being perverse, our American allies are seriously considering alternative views on global warming, including views based on research produced by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and correlated in the American media by the American Global Climate Commission, which has considerable influence on the American Government?

Mr. Prescott: Not much influence, I suspect, judging by the fact that the Americans reached an agreement. There is no serious argument about the research any more; most people are fully aware of its implications. A great deal of work has been done, although of course people must make up their own minds. Certainly, most countries agree on the subject, and the conclusions of the research pushed those countries to reach an agreement more ambitious than the one that had been predicted. I certainly would not want us to pursue a policy that disadvantaged our industries against their competitors. However, there are many advantages to be gained from having more efficient industries, a better transport system and people living a better quality of life.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the far from simple question of the carbon sink, does my right hon. Friend know that while he was pursuing his task with commendable energy, the President of Brazil and his entourage were in Britain and that some of us had the good fortune to talk in depth to Senor Dr. Martins, who is the head of Ibama? He said that if the world was so concerned about the rain forest as its lungs, the rest of the world had certain obligations to look after its lungs.

Were those obligations in terms of international debt raised in Kyoto, and what, realistically, can we hope to do to look after the planet's lungs?

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend reminds me, by using the word "lungs" with regard to forests, of a lecture that I heard by the famous Jacques Cousteau—I have an interest in diving—when he said that the oceans were the lungs of the world. Anybody who looks at climate change and at what is happening to the forests, the weather and the oceans cannot but be impressed by the tremendously sophisticated system that produces our climate.

While we need to be concerned about the rain forests and the oceans, those matters were discussed at the UN Earth summit in June. We could not reach an agreement on forests because a number of countries opposed it, but we reached an agreement on oceans, and next year is designated the Year of the Oceans.

While I was in Australia, I took the opportunity—I confess that it was on a day off—to dive on the barrier reef. It was quite an experience to see all the fish and living coral; it was nature at its greatest. When I dived in the Mediterranean, I saw no fish, just a Coke bottle and a plastic cup. That is the reality. Many of our oceans are dying and our rain forests are under threat, which is why people no longer doubt the seriousness of the scientific projections on climate change. I am proud that this Government are to the fore in making the changes.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): In view of the massive predicted increase in the burning of coal for coal-fired power generation, particularly in India and China, will the right hon. Gentleman put his considerable weight behind efforts to beef up clean coal technology in the UK?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. All Governments have failed to give the support to clean coal technology that was desperately needed. That subject is part of an on-going review of energy policies. The hon. Gentleman reminds me that China, with its tremendous coal resources, did a deal with America to build 150 nuclear plants. I presume that that represents the influence and pressures that there will be between trading nations. Such deals will be influenced by environmental considerations, which is one of the points that was made with regard to trading emissions. We must be careful to ensure that the rules are absolutely clear, because if we leave loopholes, they will undermine the credibility of any change and damage our achievements in Kyoto.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I appreciate all the work that my right hon. Friend has done. It is clearly teamwork, and we can be as proud as if we had brought the World cup home because, in the end, any achievements will be there for all the people of the world. Has my right hon. Friend considered how Parliament could be used to take the issue further forward? If we need the consent of the whole world to go forward with the proposals, Parliaments around the world have a part to play. We desperately need education, so that all the nations of the world can back up their Governments in making urgent progress.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I welcome the agreement, and we should all be thrilled by it. It is an important step forward. I do not know whether it can be equated with the World cup, but that reminds me that I was a member of the House of Commons team that beat the German parliamentary team by two goals to one, so at least we held our end up politically.

My hon. Friend makes an important point. Changes are necessary in attitude and approach, and Parliament will be at the centre of such changes. How we manage change and meet the challenge is crucial. The Environmental Audit Committee will play an important part. We have also established a Cabinet Committee to make sure that all Government Departments are aware of the changes that will take place.

Our initiative in establishing the Environmental Audit Committee emphasises the fact that we shall have a Committee snapping at our heels to ensure that we live up to our fine promises in carrying out the detail of our policy. The House will play a major part in persuading the nation that it is right to go along that road. Frankly, I think that the nation is ahead of us. People know that changes are needed, and we shall bring them about.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I pay tribute to the efforts of the right hon. Gentleman who, I believe, cares greatly about these matters. Must not the detailed policy take account of two issues, which were raised with me this morning? First, the Energy Saving Trust is scheduled to take a cut of about 50 per cent. in its funding. The right hon. Gentleman may say that that decision was made by the previous Government, but will he now take action to reverse it, especially as he spoke about using less energy, which is what the Energy Saving Trust is about?

The second point concerns the suspension of planning permission for new power stations. That is holding up 700 MW of capacity for combined heat and power. If that 700 MW of CHP came on stream, 700,000 tonnes of carbon emissions would be saved each year. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider that carefully and further encourage CHP?

Mr. Prescott: Those matters must be taken into account. The fine phrases and the targets to be set are all very well, but what will count is the detail of those policies. Whether there is a change in the funding of the Energy Saving Trust, and who introduced it, is not the point. We must reconsider much of our expenditure and our priorities. We have now accepted an agreement from Kyoto that sets legal targets. All our policies will have to be judged by their contribution to that, because we intend to enter seriously into our legal target, and into the target of 20 per cent. that we set for ourselves.

We are considering the moratorium on the power stations in the context of our energy policy. It is an essential part of any agreement on the environment. We shall make a statement at the appropriate time.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. I share the concerns that he expressed in his opening remarks, when he suggested that if action is not taken, humanity will destroy our world. It is therefore important that we take note of the points made in his statement.

Does my right hon. Friend accept that certain communities, such as the mining community, have made substantial contributions to reducing pollution of the

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atmosphere? Will he take the lead, as he is doing in many other respects, in ensuring that clean coal technology is developed in the United Kingdom, for use throughout the world?

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which we are taking into account. I am concerned about the consequences of change resulting from environmental policies. When I visited mining areas in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), I was struck by the consequences of living in communities that have been denied their main source of employment. We have set up the coalfield community task force to look at how we might help to provide the jobs necessary to reverse the decline that we witness in those areas. We have an obligation to help the parts of our communities that might well be affected, and to see whether the opportunities arising from the agreements could be directed to those areas. We are examining all those aspects.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): We welcome the fact that there has been an agreement and that the momentum is being maintained. We share some of the views expressed by the Deputy Prime Minister about the progress that remains to be made. We are delighted with the enthusiasm that he has shown in the House today for going further, and we shall encourage him at each step of the way.

I shall press the right hon. Gentleman on one or two points. He referred to the difference between the legal target of 8 per cent. and the voluntary manifesto target of 20 per cent. I put it to him that in achieving the 20 per cent., we shall easily achieve our legal requirements. Therefore, is not that the target on which to focus British policy and the target which we should take into our discussions with the European Union?

I refer to one or two specific points. The Energy Saving Trust has been mentioned.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor), the Liberal Democrat environment spokesman, made quite a long contribution earlier, to which he received a considerable reply from the Deputy Prime Minister. Hon. Members should ask one question each—that is what this process is all about. Mr. Prescott, will you respond?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) for his remarks—although he is having difficulty keeping up with the pace that we have set. We shall do our best to achieve the targets.

The hon. Gentleman made a serious point. The legal target in Europe will be achieved in a certain way, and we have an obligation to achieve it in that manner also. That will have some implications for the 20 per cent. target, but it should not prevent us from continuing with our programme—which we are spelling out at present. We have an obligation to the legal target, but that will not deter us from achieving a higher target, which we shall set for ourselves and which we are currently working out. I shall make a statement about that to the House at the appropriate time.

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): I join hon. Members in warmly welcoming the Deputy Prime Minister's statement. Does my right hon. Friend agree that local energy advice centres, which are funded by the Energy Saving Trust, play a significant role in combating global warming? Does he further agree that, under the previous Conservative Administration, those centres—including my local centre in Peterborough, which has been highly praised nationally—had a very insecure funding future? Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the importance of those centres when he takes his imminent decision about the funding of the Energy Saving Trust?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind remarks. The Energy Saving Trust and the local centres will be very important in achieving our targets. Many decisions that have been taken must be reassessed in view of the targets that were set in Kyoto. It is true that all communities must make an effort to achieve the targets that we have set for ourselves, and we shall bear that in mind during the review.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on helping to secure any agreement at all in Kyoto. I also congratulate him on advocating a higher level of cuts around the world and on ensuring that the words "contraction" and "convergence" were included in the agreement in the final hour of negotiations. They will prove to be the cornerstone of any workable progress in this area in the century ahead.

Will my right hon. Friend ensure that two points are raised during the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union and in discussions with the G8? First, the targets cannot be met acceptably by transnational companies simply relocating to the developing world and being allowed to get away with production methods that increase, rather than decrease, pollution. Secondly, in approaching tradeable permits, we must examine not the exchange of cash with the developing world but a gift relationship in sustainable technologies. That will allow development in the southern hemisphere according to the best standards for the next century rather than the worst standards of this century.

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. The agenda of the EU presidency, and particularly discussions in the G8, will be decided by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. My hon. Friend may be assured that I shall push to ensure that issues relevant to Kyoto are discussed. That is essential if we are to achieve the desired framework for the timetable in which the groups will work out the rules for trading emissions. It would be a wasted opportunity if such discussions did not occur. My hon. Friend will be aware that the agendas are decided by the Prime Minister and by other Prime Ministers and Presidents involved in the process. Nevertheless, those matters will play an important part.

My hon. Friend referred to transnational companies, their contributions and the tradeable permits that will be involved in exchanges with different countries. Those matters go to the credibility of the rules. Those rules are

important, and about 40 developing countries were prepared to make a voluntary commitment on trading in Kyoto. However, that matter was not included in the agreement. It is a sign, however, that they see it as a possible way forward for themselves.

My hon. Friend was fair-minded when he talked about industrial processes in the third world. We must recognise that third-world countries will produce more CO_2 gases as part of the industrialised process. It would be wrong for developed countries to say, "We have come through this process the dirty way. We know that it is a dirty way from which to come, so you cannot have the benefits that come from the industrialised process."

We must achieve a proper balance and recognise the differential contributions that must be made by both developed and developing countries. In effect, the Kyoto agreement states that the developed countries can say, "We have made our commitment and we want you to make yours." In that process, the developed countries will have great opportunities to work with the developing countries, provided that there is an agreement that that should happen and that it is done voluntarily. It must be recognised as part of the procedure of improving the prosperity of the peoples of the developing countries in the process of industrialisation. I am talking of the gains that come from these processes, and they must be brought home to the public.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's efforts, which have been substantial. It is good to see Britain losing its "dirty man" image. I am aware that the right hon. Gentleman regards national targets as important, and at the same time we know that vehicle emissions make a significant contribution to greenhouse gases. Against that background, will the Government be supporting the Road Traffic Reduction (United Kingdom Targets) Bill?

Mr. Prescott: It is important that the owners of vehicles can make one of the largest contributions to the reduction of CO_2 emissions, and that is a problem which we must consider. The White Paper will take up the problem and the Government will make our predictions within an integrated transport policy and establish what we think is the appropriate balance. Within such a policy, it is necessary to balance everything that it is hoped to achieve over a period. We welcome the debate that continues to take place, and we are not making recommendations one way or the other. Right hon. and hon. Members can make up their minds about the private Member's Bill. The Government will set out their view in the White Paper on an integrated transport policy, which will be put forward in May.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I thank my right hon. Friend for answering the question that I put to him at Question Time, by giving a commitment that Labour will continue to back the 20 per cent. reduction.

Since the Kyoto agreement becomes legally binding when countries ratify the treaty, what authority will deal with the countries that break their legally binding obligations, and what penalties will be imposed? Could consideration be given to penalties that will help to repair the damage that is done to developing countries, such as the flooding of coastal areas, crop failures and the spreading of diseases, to which my right hon. Friend drew the attention of the House?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his words of support. The protocol is in the Library, along with the details of how we approached it. As for sanctions, we begin with the hope that the countries involved will set out to achieve the targets to which they are legally bound. If they fail to do so, there are means by which they can be pursued within their own courts. That applies especially to America. One of the Americans' arguments was that if they signed up to legal targets, they could be sued much more effectively within their own courts than within the European courts. To some extent, they were right.

The sanctions that are envisaged in the international treaty apply to trading. There was talk of fines, the proceeds from which could be used to assist third-world countries. There was talk also of the denial of votes in future decisions. Those may not seem to be powerful enough sanctions, and perhaps they will be reviewed. An important step forward has been taken in achieving a legal agreement. Where we find that it is not sufficient, there will be continuity of assessment. Insufficiency can be examined if we find that there is a failure in achieving the targets that have been agreed.

We set the overall target for 2010, but a review conference will review the progress that countries have made. That means that we shall not have to wait until 2010 to ascertain whether there has been failure. We shall know what progress has been made well before then.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that since the deregulation of buses in 1986, there has been a considerable increase in the number of buses that cause pollution on our roads? Indeed, about 15 per cent. of buses now cause about 50 per cent. of pollution. What plans does my right hon. Friend have to take some of these polluting monsters off the road as part of our contribution to the Kyoto agreement?

Mr. Prescott: That is one of the measures that we are considering in our White Paper. It is quite true—the evidence is clear—that deregulation has meant that there are more buses, but fewer people per bus, and fewer services, which forces more and more people to use their cars instead of public transport. We very much need to address that.

We hope that travel by bus will become more reliable, and that buses will be better and, in many cases, newer than the ones that we currently have, with an engine that meets environmental requirements. We are also talking about the fiscal framework with regard to vehicle excise duty. All those points are being considered in the White Paper. The bus has a major part to play in providing not only a better transport system but a better environment, which would arise from an integrated system. It is very much at the heart of the White Paper that we shall produce in May.

Water Industry (Scotland)

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the outcome of the Government's review of the Scottish water and sewerage industry.

As hon. Members will know, our manifesto contained a commitment to return the Scottish water industry to local democratic control. In an answer on 5 June, *Official Report*, column *233*, I said that I had asked my officials to conduct a review of the water industry and to report to me by November, which they have done.

The review team had extensive consultations with the three water authorities, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council. We also issued a public consultation paper, which produced 91 responses. I am very grateful to all who responded so constructively, and I shall place their responses in the library of St Andrew's house. The review team also held discussions with a variety of other interests, and commissioned research into water industry models across the world. We have listened very carefully to what has been said before reaching our conclusions.

In conducting the review, we were guided by a number of important principles. Apart from the central theme of improving democratic accountability, we also wanted to facilitate investment, promote efficiency, ensure continuity of public water supplies, protect public health and minimise disruption to the industry. The importance of these principles, and the importance of the industry for all of us in our day-to-day lives, was demonstrated only too dramatically by events in recent days in the west of Scotland.

Those events are very serious, not least in terms of the severe dislocation caused to everyday life for some 60,000 people. I can announce today that Mr. Robert Fraser, a distinguished figure in the water industry and, until recently, director of water and drainage for Borders regional council, will lead an exhaustive inquiry into the circumstances. I have asked him to address the following points: first, to review the causes, nature and extent of the disruption to public water supplies in the area served by Burncrooks water treatment works, including the impact on the vulnerable sectors of the population, food industries and other water users; secondly, to review the West of Scotland water authority's response to the incident; thirdly, to consider the lessons to be learned for the future from such an event, in particular whether advice to the public needs to be given earlier, whether better arrangements need to be made for the provision of alternative supplies of drinking water, and whether improved arrangements are required for co-ordination within and between public authorities, and with the media; and, fourthly, to report and make recommendations.

I fully understand the great public concern and the sense of irritation over this incident. I have spoken personally to both the chief executive and the chairman of West of Scotland Water today. I am glad to be able to report that contamination levels are falling steadily, and I understand that 17,000 of the 22,000 households originally affected now have clean water. I have been assured that lessons will be learned, but I shall want to look hard at Mr. Fraser's report. Because of the urgent need to get the facts and learn the lessons, I am anxious to have a tight but realistic timetable. Therefore, I have asked for the report to be completed by the end of March. I shall not make judgments before I see it, but if further action is required, I shall not hesitate to take it.

This episode does, nevertheless, serve to remind us that the water industry faces two immediate and major problems. The first is water purity—the stark fact being that the purity of Scottish water is far down the United Kingdom league; indeed, the three authorities in Scotland are in the bottom five when comparisons are made across the United Kingdom.

The second problem is the chronic need for investment, especially in sewerage, to meet the requirements of European directives. Although the period of local authority control is looked back on as a time when the ownership of the industry was generally acceptable, we have to accept that the infrastructure—often Victorian—was allowed to decay, and the consequences of that now mean that very great sums are required to bring the industry up to a satisfactory level. We have to consider how we can best assist the industry in its task to meet the real demands ahead.

I come now to the various options that emerged during the review. We looked carefully at a wide range of proposals for the industry. Splitting the three authorities between the 32 separate unitary authorities was quickly ruled out. It is clear that disturbing the three-authority structure would have disproportionate costs.

A leading option, however, was to seek to improve accountability by transferring responsibility for water and sewerage services to joint boards of local authorities. Joint boards can be an effective way of providing strategic services, and the water authorities undoubtedly provide a vital public service. However, the water authorities are also large businesses with massive investment requirements and just three authorities cover Scotland's 32 local authorities. I have therefore had to reject this approach. The last local government reorganisation made those options virtually impossible.

We also carefully considered the imaginative case advanced by some consultees to convert the public water authorities into private non-profit-distributing companies such as mutuals. Such bodies would be freed from the capital controls of the public sector, but at a cost. That cost would be freeing them from answerability to any democratic body. I do not believe that that is what the Scottish people want. It would be entirely outside the public sector. The industry would effectively be privatised.

A mutual would be nominally controlled by its membership, but how effective control over the boards would operate is much less clear. I am also not convinced that a mutual, monopoly water authority would be under sufficient pressure to be efficient, as all experience tells us that individual customers will not be motivated to protect their interests. Nor am I convinced that unwelcome pressures to demutualise could be avoided. In the short term, it would be very disruptive for the industry. I have therefore also had to reject that way forward.

Despite that, it is clear to me that, if the investment needs of the Scottish water industry are to be met at a cost the consumer can afford, we shall need to harness private capital and expertise, within a framework of continuing public accountability. Let me first deal with the crucial issue of accountability.

Since we launched the review, the Scottish people have given a resounding endorsement to the concept of a Scottish Parliament. Our White Paper on Scotland's Parliament made clear our concerns about the number of public bodies in Scotland being run without clear democratic oversight. It said that we saw the new Parliament as a means of bringing them under strengthened democratic accountability. Responsibility for the water and sewerage industry will pass to the Scottish Parliament. In the longer term, the Parliament may wish to look again at some of the arguments for change, but those could not and should not be options for today and tomorrow. In any event, I would expect that it will wish to allow the system to settle, and to perform, before considering any further options.

The Scottish Parliament will be able to bring the water authorities under the proper level of scrutiny that a modern democracy demands, through its oversight of the Scottish Executive. That is the best way of delivering the will of the Scottish people for their water industry to remain unambiguously in public ownership and to be clearly democratically accountable.

As well as the water authorities becoming more accountable, I wish to see them become more responsive at a local level. As part of developing local responsiveness I shall ask the water authorities to build further on their links with the local authorities and community councils in their areas, which will be helped by the community planning system we are shortly to introduce.

I also look to the water authorities to get closer to their customers and to other important local stakeholders including environmental interests. I shall very shortly issue a direction to the water authorities to review their systems for involving local interests, particularly local authorities, and to improve and strengthen those systems. I also propose to place a statutory duty on the water authorities to consult the local authorities whose electors would be affected by major decisions. That should improve the water authorities' responsiveness to the concerns of local communities.

Moreover, I can today announce new appointments to the water authority boards. Ian Preston and John Robertson, chairmen of the East and North water authorities respectively, will demit office at the end of March. I am very grateful to both of them for their good work and dedicated public service. In the East water authority, Councillor Robert Cairns will take over, and in the North, Councillor Colin Rennie. John Jameson remains chairman of the West authority. In addition to the two new chairmen, I am appointing as new members in the East authority, Councillor Jeanette Burness, Councillor Thomas Dair, David Bleiman and John Broadfoot. New members in the West authority are Councillor Gerald Carroll, Councillor David Munn and Jane McKay; and in the North authority I am appointing Nigel Hawkins as a new member. I am also reappointing a total of seven current members to the boards. Those appointments bring the number of local councillors on boards up to 16 out of the 33 members, excluding chief executives—roughly half the total. Of those 16 elected members, six are Labour councillors. I have made full details of the appointments available in the Library.

One aspect of local responsiveness that I wish to explore further is how best to help with the problems of water supply and sewerage in many of our remoter rural areas. I have asked officials to consider whether there is a case for reintroducing rural grants to help with such problems.

As I have already said, the water industry review has again emphasised that the industry is in need of very substantial investment if the Scottish people are to have the quality of water that they deserve. That investment will have to be paid for, which, put simply, means that all water consumers will have to pay more in the years ahead. Let me be quite clear: this investment is needed to bring the quality of our water up to the standards in other parts of the country, to protect our beaches, rivers and seas, and to renew the infrastructure gifted us by previous generations, which more recent generations have neglected.

The private finance initiative is paying off by helping us to acquire additional resources to meet European Community environmental deadlines, and by identifying innovatory ways of making savings in the capital and operating cost of projects. The water authorities have substantial plans for PFI projects, amounting to some £600 million, to help meet their investment needs in the years ahead. The Government are committed to developing opportunities for public-private partnerships. I encourage the water authorities to be innovative with such partnerships while working within the framework of strengthened democratic control that I have outlined.

The Scottish people will need safeguards to ensure that money raised is well spent. There was consensus among the major consultees that the current division between price regulation by the customers council and efficiency regulation by the Scottish Office has proved untenable. I propose to create a new position of regulator responsible for all aspects of economic regulation, and for promoting the customer interest.

The water authorities will be under legitimate democratic oversight, but they are still monopolies, and the new regulator will have operational independence to ensure that the customer gets the best possible deal. The regulator will be accountable to the Scottish Parliament through the Scottish Executive. To safeguard the independence of the regulator's role, the position will be established in statute.

The functions of the current customers council will be transferred to the new unified regulator, and the council in its current form will be wound up. However, it is essential that customers continue to have a strong independent voice. I propose to develop the role of the three customers council area committees as the champion of the individual customer. Those committees in their developed form will be accountable to the new regulator, and will provide a point of contact for the public.

I have also listened carefully to representations about the damaging uncertainty for the industry of the current one-year time horizon for price and external financing limits decisions. I propose a longer-term pricing framework, and we should aim to ensure as stable a borrowing framework as possible, despite changing circumstances in successive public spending plans.

I have also listened carefully to the views expressed to us during the review about the contribution that people with business experience have made to the boards of the new public authorities, alongside councillors. As will be clear from the appointments that I have announced,

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I judge it essential that we continue to draw on the expertise that the private sector can offer to ensure well-balanced and effective boards.

In sum, my proposals represent real local responsiveness, and real democratic control. They show that we have listened very carefully and thoughtfully to what has been said during our extensive consultations. We are seizing the opportunities created by the Scottish Parliament to have more democratic control of the industry, and to find the best way forward, given the particular sensitivities of the industry. We shall not play politics with Scottish water.

My proposals to change the system of regulation will require legislation, and the Government will look for an appropriate opportunity to legislate. I am publishing today a factual document that I asked the review team to prepare, which sets out in more detail the outcome of the review. Copies will be available from the Vote Office.

I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Rather to my surprise, I give a qualified welcome to the statement, not so much for what is in it as for what is not in it. I begin by welcoming the somewhat belated response to last week's serious incident in the west of Scotland, and the appointment of Mr. Robert Fraser to hold an inquiry. What happened last week has caused much justified concern to local residents and to local businesses, and there is an urgent need not only for rectification but for reassurance. I am sure that the appointment of Mr. Robert Fraser will help in that regard.

The statement constitutes a surprising but none the less welcome climbdown from the Labour party's former position. After the lion's roars of the right hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Robertson) when he was shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and spoke about water—and, indeed, the pledges in the manifesto—the Secretary of State has produced a mouse of a statement, and a mouse which is strangely silent.

Let me remind the Secretary of State of what was said before the election. He may recall—indeed, he reminded us today—that the manifesto contained a pledge to return Scotland's water services to local democratic control. In 1995, the Scottish Labour manifesto issued before the Scottish unitary authority elections stated:

"The next Labour Government will return water to directly-elected control."

In the same year, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, South said at the Scottish Labour party conference:

"I make this clear pledge to the Scottish people. On my first day in St. Andrew's House I will end this undemocratic farce. All the Water Quango Appointees—whoever they are—will be told to clear their desks"—

and he added bravely:

"and I won't take no for an answer."

When we strip away the verbiage of today's statement, we find very little change. There is a change in the system of regulation, and in some of the membership of the authorities—although, as we have heard today, not enough to provide locally democratic control—but the three-authority structure that was so opposed by the Labour party in opposition is retained. There is no return to directly elected or indeed local control, and there is no wholesale clearing of desks, as promised by the right hon. Member for Hamilton, South.

I must say that I welcome this outbreak of realism—this victory for common sense over pre-election rhetoric. Conservative Members are becoming used to Labour's pre-election promises being jettisoned in government, but we would welcome the jettisoning of many more, and we certainly welcome the abandonment of one today. We also welcome the fact that the need for investment from the private sector—which was at the heart of our policy—has caused a change of mind, as the Secretary of State made clear in the small print of what he said.

I note the Secretary of State's concern about the purity of Scottish water, and his comment that the three Scottish authorities are among the bottom five in the United Kingdom league. How has Scotland fared relatively since water privatisation in England? Have the Scottish authorities gone up or down in the league? I also note the right hon. Gentleman's comment that, under public ownership and local authority control, the infrastructure was allowed to decay. Was that not because that type of control and ownership prevented private investment from being made available to repair the infrastructure? Is that not the real reason why the right hon. Gentleman has decided to proceed as he has announced today?

The right hon. Gentleman spoke of the future role of a Scottish Parliament. We await the publication of the Bill setting up such a Parliament with some anticipation, but is the right hon. Gentleman not concerned that leaving a final decision to a Scottish Parliament prolongs uncertainty, and makes less likely the vital private investment that is so urgently needed? Does he envisage a Scottish Parliament opting for an all-Scotland water authority, and would he seek to dissuade it if it sought to do so?

What criteria were applied in the replacement of the chairmen of the North and East authorities by Labour councillors? What business experience do those councillors have, particularly in the utility industries, and are their experience and expertise greater than those of the two existing chairmen? In what ways will the new chairmen be able to increase the amount of private finance being invested in the water and sewerage industry in Scotland, and what has COSLA's reaction been to the right hon. Gentleman's rejection of the mutualisation plan that it submitted?

All in all, this has been an interesting diet of past words for the right hon. Gentleman, and we have enjoyed watching him make a meal of them. We make no complaint: there is always much joy in heaven over any sinner that repents, and we welcome the Secretary of State's transition from the populist rhetoric of opposition to the economic reality of administration. Conservative Members hope that there will be many moves in that direction in the future.

Mr. Dewar: I loved the ending! I must tell the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), however, that repentance of sins is one of the few areas in which I bend my knee to him.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the West of Scotland water authority, and I welcome his welcome. Of course I am deeply concerned about what has happened. I have not only a ministerial but a constituency

interest, as have one or two of my team colleagues. We will await the report with considerable interest, and I hope that lessons will really be learned if faults are found in the system.

As for the appointments of the two new chairmen, those two candidates—like every other candidate who was appointed—had to undergo a rigorous Nolan procedure, in which their credentials and suitability for the posts were assessed. They came through with flying colours. The work and the performance of both are known to me, and I have no hesitation in seeing a useful and distinguished role for them. I pay tribute to their predecessors, and do so with every genuineness. Both have given long service—"dedicated service" was the phrase that I used; I think that that phrase is sometimes undervalued. It was time for a change, however, and I think that the two new incumbents will do very well.

The right hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the business backgrounds of the new chairmen. If we applied that test to Ministers in any party, some interesting gaps might appear. People have the ability and the mental equipment to do certain jobs, and I am very confident about these appointments.

As for mutualisation, yes, there was some lively debate, but I think that the vast majority of the consultees came down against the proposition. I tried—within the bounds of decent length—to explain some of the reasons for that. If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the arguments, as set out both by the review body and by those who offered opinions, he will see why there were difficulties about the scheme. I have no doubt that people will continue to argue for the other point of view, but, as I stressed in my statement, I feel that a period of stability to allow the arrangements to settle in would be wise and, I hope, helpful.

I do not mind being abused for responsibility, by the right hon. Gentleman or by anyone else. As far as I am concerned, we could have a very interesting economic argument; but the industry will require some £1.5 billion by the year 2000, which means that we must attack on all fronts. The Government must do their best, of course, but private-public sector partnerships must also be brought into play. I consider that a sensible approach.

What we have here is a scheme that leaves Scottish water unambiguously in the public sector, giving it a much more durable and, in my view, effective framework and a much greater level of both democratic accountability and democratic control through its membership and through the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I welcome the appointment of Jane McKay, whose experience and ability were not recognised as they ought to have been by the previous Administration. I also welcome the return to democratic and public control of the industry.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a bit rich for the Opposition spokesperson to comment on these matters, given that it was bodies such as Strathclyde regional council whose campaign against water privatisation helped to retain that important industry in public hands? Had it not been for Strathclyde's vigorous campaign, Scotland might be suffering from water privatisation like the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dewar: I agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful for her comments. To be fair, the present Opposition spokesman on Scottish affairs was otherwise engaged, as, in a sense, I was, while those debates were taking place—he looks slightly disengaged at the moment in fact, but I would not hold that against him. The important thing is that he must live with the fact that there is a strong view in Scotland that the public sector is the proper place for the water industry. That does not mean that the public sector and, in particular, the water authorities do not have to introduce innovative and imaginative procedures that would allow them to raise standards in the way that we want. I look forward to that happening.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I welcome the investigation under Mr. Robert Fraser. While staying with family in Milngavie on Sunday evening, I had to suffer the deprivations of the contaminated water. Can the Secretary of State give any indication of when a normal water supply is likely to be resumed to the remaining 5,000 houses?

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) mentioned Strathclyde and the referendum that was held there. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, save exchanging a few councillors for previously non-elected personnel on the boards, he is substantially retaining the scheme that 97 per cent. of the people voted against in the referendum?.

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. Wallace: I think that the Secretary of State will find that the structure is substantially the same as that against which those people voted. Can he not accept that that is not local accountability? If anyone were to be found culpable for what has happened in the west of Scotland, surely he should be answerable democratically to an electorate and not—through some way—to the Secretary of State or, ultimately, to the Scottish Parliament.

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has said that he is to examine the rural grants, but will he accept that there is no logic in connecting the islands areas, for example, to any other part of Scotland for water, as water falls there and is self-contained? Local authorities should have greater input, so that they can take economic development and water together and we do not have another body that has a totally different responsibility. That is the argument for democratic control, which could come through joint boards, which were so lightly dismissed in his statement.

Will the Secretary of State accept that the public sector borrowing requirement is substantially for investment that is to be met by tax and here we are dealing with investment—we accept that substantial investment is needed in water—that is met from revenue from customers? Would it not make sense to take the water industry in Scotland out of the PSBR, remove it from the Secretary of State's external finance limit and allow the industry to go to the market, to raise funds there and to be subject to normal market conditions?

Mr. Dewar: I listened with interest to what the hon. and learned Member said with increasing confusion—increasing confusion seemed to be inherent and in-built in his statement. Of course, it is tempting to say,

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"Take investment outwith the PSBR limits", but it is difficult to reconcile that with putting it firmly into the local government sector. We can do one or the other and it may be possible to argue for one or the other, but we cannot have our cake and eat it in the way in which he suggests.

This is not just a tinkering of personnel. Changes such as the introduction of the regulator and the demise of the customers council—the great tightening up in that area—will, I hope, increase pressure for efficiency and give a much more satisfactory regulatory machinery. We will have one regulatory individual, one regulatory force, which is involved not just in the pricing side of the argument, but in the wider strategic side—the economics of the industry. That is an important change.

Finally—well very nearly finally—I am surprised by the way in which the hon. and learned Member writes off the scrutiny of the Scottish Parliament. In his perhaps more benign moments, I think that he would accept that the intention is to produce a much more effective scrutiny machinery—given the scale of politics in Scotland—than has been possible, for example, in this distinguished House. The more immediate accessibility of the Scottish Parliament will be an important factor in that sense.

There was not a vote against the present arrangements in the referendum. The referendum was a vote on privatisation.

Mr. Wallace: It was not.

Mr. Dewar: Oh yes it was. Privatisation is certainly what the vast majority of people voted on, so I think that the hon. and learned Member is in some difficulty.

The final thing that I will say, and it is important, is that I cannot, of course, give a hard and fast answer on when the inconvenience and dislocation that have resulted from the diesel spill at Burncrooks will end, but I have said today that we understand that 17,000 of the 22,000 households now have clean water. I understand that the situation is improving rapidly, so I hope that, throughout the whole area—even in Milngavie; particularly perhaps in Milngavie—we will see a quick end to the problems.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. It was cheeky for the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) to talk about handing things back to local control as he gerrymandered the local authority system before the election, which makes it almost impossible to do that.

I know that people in Tayside will welcome the appointments of Councillor Colin Rennie, who—I suppose that I should declare an interest—works part time for me and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), and who will obviously have to stop doing that from March next year, and of Nigel Hawkins, who is well known as a member of Dundee Partnership.

Much more important, I agree with my right hon. Friend's statement. I was surprised that the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) should have so little faith in the Scottish Parliament. Only yesterday, at the Scottish Constitutional Convention, we were talking about the new committee system. Clearly, this would fit well into that.

Mr. Dewar: I thoroughly endorse what my hon. Friend says, and I am grateful for his interest in these matters. The change in personnel is significant. It goes beyond perhaps the individuals concerned; it is also a matter of approach on the part of the Government to the appointments and a recognition of the special situation of the water industry in Scotland. I have already chided the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland, so it would not be fair to go back to that. As I have said, I know that in other forums and on other occasions, he takes a much more enthusiastic view of what we can achieve through the Scottish Parliament. In this particular sector, I hope that much will be done. I gather that the hon. and learned Member will be a candidate, so he will see it no doubt from within; some others of us may just watch from without.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Can the Secretary of State explain in more detail exactly where the democratisation is, because I must admit that I thought that a page was missing from my copy of the statement? Will he explain how replacing Michael Forsyth's appointees with some of his own—from whichever party or from none—is an improvement? Surely a quango is still a quango. As regulators have so far been appointed only for privatised utilities, what message and signal does it send to the electors of Scotland that the new democratic arrangements for Scottish water need a regulator? Lastly, given that he has the support of the Conservative party, does he have no doubts at all about the democratisation of his scheme?

Mr. Dewar: I take the view that even the Conservative party may get the odd thing right if it tries long enough and works hard enough. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes such a cynical view of those whose Benches—admittedly separated by the chasm of the Gangway—he shares, but may I caution him in any event: if he thought that the comments of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) amounted to a ringing endorsement, he lives in a depressed world. There is an important distinction.

When the water industry was left by the Conservative Government, clearly, it had been reluctantly halted on the brink of total privatisation. One got the impression that it was a staging post until better political times, when the job could be completed. We are now putting water unambiguously in the public sector. As I have said, we are strengthening the democratic controls and we are reconnecting in terms not just of membership, but of the statutory duty to consult, to which I have referred, with local authorities. Of course, we are also looking forward to the more immediate links that can be built with a Scottish Parliament. There is real democratic content, although I recognise it is not all that the hon. Gentleman wants in terms of the wider political settlement. However, I hope that he recognises that there are substantial and real gains.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Paragraph 4.17 of the review report refers to

"the new investment needed to meet Ministers' policies on the environment and health".

The Secretary of State will know from my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) in particular and from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the desperate need for investment not only in the Esk valley but in other

parts of Lothian in relation to industry and improving the environment. Has my right hon. Friend any good news for us about where the investment is likely to come from?

Mr. Dewar: I recognise the problem to which my hon. Friend refers. I think that the Esk valley scheme was directly and sensibly raised a few days ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian, so I know that there is much pressure on the issue. I spoke about an amount of £1.5 billion up to the year 2000. It is clear that substantial sums are needed, and there is about £600 million in the pipeline in the form of partnership schemes and private finance initiatives of one sort or another. If I remember rightly, the East of Scotland water authority's Esk valley project is included in the list, and the scheme is one of those that are currently in preparation. I assure my hon. Friend that there is a real commitment and that it will be reflected in the new authorities, as, to be fair, it is reflected in the present system, to try to tackle the problems as energetically and as quickly as we can.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): I have great personal confidence in Councillor Robert Cairns and my remarks in no way reflect on him.

The Secretary of State's idea of accountability is not mine. To appoint a regulator and to claim that that is some form of accountability is to take us back to colonial governorship. Surely the Secretary of State should re-examine the possibility of joint boards working effectively, whether they consist of councillors or Members of the Scottish Parliament or both. Could he not look at the issue of user democracy, which is different from the mutualisation that he has mentioned and, I understand, works in parts of the Netherlands? There are other ways to make the water industry more accountable. He should accept the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace); capital could be found if the right hon. Gentleman merely put a pen through some of the more stupid Treasury regulations, as happens in continental countries, so that we could find the capital under a democratic system without going into this PFI rubbish.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman uses not so much a pen as a broad brush in his approach to these problems. *[Interruption.]* Why not? Management of the Treasury cannot be conducted in that way. I suspect that if the Liberal Democrats had a role in power they might find that the, "Pssch, don't bother me with Treasury rules" approach would create some difficulties. There is difficulty about mutualisation, and I tried to sketch it in. I am not sure of the distinction between a mutual system and user democracy, but, under a mutual system, ownership, at least in theory, would lie with the person on whom the bill was served. There are difficulties in regarding that as effective and public control. No doubt that discussion can take place on another occasion.

I am genuinely surprised about the way in which the regulator and that change has been dismissed by Liberal Democrat Members. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman intended it, but I got the impression that he was laying down a new Liberal Democrat policy against regulators. They will have some difficulty in explaining the virtues of that to the consumer movement.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): May I welcome the good bits of the Minister's statement and express my immense disappointment at the lack of progress in democratising Scotland's water service? To move to a system under which one man, one vote appoints 33 members to the three water authorities is not sufficient to meet the needs that have been expressed by the people of Scotland throughout long campaigns against privatisation and Tory policy. I do not understand why joint authorities are made impossible by local government reorganisation. Strathclyde police and the fire service have continued under local government reorganisation, and I can see no reason why, if COSLA and local authorities had been consulted, they could not have come up with a workable means of appointing people with an electoral mandate to run the water authorities in the public interest.

There is great difficulty in Scotland over the number of people who are accountable to no one bar the Secretary of State. If we are keen on the dequangoisation of Scotland, we ought to have started at the first available opportunity, which is with the water service. I suppose that I and many others in Scotland have to look forward to the Scottish Parliament to do the job properly. I wish that, in this appointment as in others, the Secretary of State would be more prepared to trust those who have an electoral mandate directly from the people of Scotland.

Mr. Dewar: I appreciate, of course, that my hon. Friend in his council and parliamentary career has espoused and argued that view. I do not think that it is practical. Without wishing to burden him with additional and perhaps unwelcome Christmas cheer, may I suggest to him that he reads the report and the consultation documents that were produced? If he does that, he will find, of course, that there was some discussion of joint authorities. However, I do not think that there was what could be described as a weight of opinion for that option. I think that we have struck a fair balance. It is important to have continuity in the industry. There are currently many difficult projects in train, and I regard the statement's contents as genuine progress. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in at least seeing that as some improvement.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Looking on from Northern Ireland, I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has established that the water industry will be in the public sector for the future. He could have gone a little further by ensuring more influence by elected representatives. Nevertheless, he has faced the problem of lack of water purity, the difficulties over sewage disposal and the need for more investment in that service. I was surprised to hear in his statement that, even with the £600 million of PFI investment, no target date has been set for water quality to be up to at least the average of other United Kingdom regions.

Mr. Dewar: I did not feel able to set that target. It will be some time before the new arrangements come into force. The regulator's new unified approach, the ability to balance the interests of the consumer in the broader sense, which includes not only the level of charges but the service that is delivered, and the pressure for greatly increased efficiency will all help.

I have a list of important PFI projects that are in the process of procurement. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will be interested in the Almond valley and Seafield scheme. There is a

[Mr. Dewar]

range of such schemes, and much is happening. I am grateful to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) for his broad welcome. I agree that the settlement is based very much on public duty in the public sector and on the vital and essential place of the water industry in our everyday life.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I tell my right hon. Friend how welcome his words are on the public inquiry into the West of Scotland water authority? It is run by a bunch of useless incompetents. Was not it the case that they did not have a comprehensive contingency plan in place to deal with the recent emergency? In that regard, they are quite unlike the other two authorities. Those incompetent administrators recently sought to ride roughshod over serious local concerns in Gourock in connection with the building of a sewerage system. Inverclyde council changed things slightly. I hope that we shall not again see local concerns being ignored.

I, too, welcome the appointment of Jane McKay, and I share the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson).

Mr. Dewar: I am glad that there is a welcome for that particular appointment, but I should say that that candidate went through the same selection process as all the rest. Although the selection process can at times be a little constrictive, I welcome the fact that we now have some consistency, at least in its basic part.

I cannot join my hon. Friend in making judgments on what happened in the Burncrooks incident or in making assumptions about whether there was personal culpability or whether systems were adequate. I certainly think that it is important that hard questions are answered, and that will be the inquiry's job. Once we have the facts, perhaps we can make judgments about what is best and what lessons have to be learned.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am sure that the House will welcome the Secretary of State's statement that he does not intend to play politics with the water industry and will recognise in that statement a euphemism for dropping the pre-election policy and rhetoric of the Labour party, which is embracing in large measure the previous Conservative Administration's policies on the water industry's structure. Does he realise that—as in the vote on lone-parent benefits, and subject to the detail of legislation that he introduces—he can expect to receive support from the Conservative party for measures that are similar to those proposed by the previous Conservative Government?

On a point of practical detail, does the right hon. Gentleman expect that, as the PFI proceeds in the water industry, ownership of key assets in that industry will progressively transfer out of public ownership and into private ownership?

Mr. Dewar: I do not make that assumption at all. Apart from anything else, the authorities' asset base is a matter for judgment and good sense in management. I do not take the type of ideological approach to these matters that the hon. Gentleman, by implication, wishes on me, and I am sorry that he should try to do that. His support in these matters is not necessary, and I caution Conservative Members for assuming that it would even be welcomed. He must make his own decision in this and in other cases. I should like to think that on this issue, as on many other issues, I have been admirably consistent over the years. Although often consistently wrong, I have at least been consistent.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, which will be seen by the people of Scotland as the roar of their Scottish lion—rather than as the squeak of a mouse from afar. Last night, at a public meeting in my constituency held by the Scottish water council, it was stated that there was a need for more transparency and public accountability in the water industry. Does he agree that bringing more councillors on to boards will make them more accountable, more responsive and more transparent?

Mr. Dewar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although I am not sure that I ever see myself as a lion. I would be a rather skinny version of the beast—although I should add that I enjoy Scotch beef.

We will keep the situation under review, and I hope that there will be a period of stability. It will be some time before we have a legislative opportunity to make some of the changes, but I very much hope that boards will be allowed to work effectively in the public interest and in the interests of everyone. I am confident that that will be the case, but we will continue to monitor and not be afraid to go further down a particular policy road to get the type of results that we all want.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and particularly the very significant increase in democratic accountability for Scottish water within the public sector. Will he undertake to explain to the Scottish people the unavoidable necessity for increased water charges in the next few years? Specifically, will he explain that increases are nothing whatever to do with the use of public-private partnerships, which are absolutely essential, but arise because of the considerable backlog of under-investment inherited after 18 years of Conservative rule?

Mr. Dewar: My hon. Friend is still working from a good brief, I see. Yes, he is absolutely right: there is no painless escape from the current situation. Large sums will have to be raised, and large sums will have to be spent. That is partly a problem for the Treasury and partly a matter of partnership arrangements and the PFI approach. The consumer will bear some of the strain, and it would be dishonest if we did not recognise that that fact is built into the situation. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's realism.

School Children's Clothing and Footwear (Value Added Tax)

5.15 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the zero-rating of the supply of items of clothing and footwear for use only as part of an approved school uniform.

I have sat here patiently for almost two hours listening to ministerial statements on exotic subjects from pollution and hot air to the people's sewage. Those will be difficult acts to follow, but I will give it my best shot.

I start by declaring an interest in that I have three children, all of whom are likely eventually to be wearers of school uniform. It therefore came as a surprise to me to learn—because of a campaign by a local school outfitter, in Worthing—that those uniforms may be subject to the full VAT rate of 17.5 per cent., even before my children are teenagers. It came as a surprise also to many of my colleagues who are supporting my Bill, as they were under the impression that children's clothing, and particularly school uniforms, were zero-rated for VAT. It certainly comes as a surprise to many parents, who find that they are faced with the surcharge—on usually compulsory school uniforms—at a very expensive time, when bringing up young children.

The Bill would affect literally millions of families throughout the country—thousands in each hon. Member's constituency. As such, I hope that it will receive the support of the whole House. I believe that it addresses an anomaly in VAT law that was never intended.

The problem stems from the fact that there is no definition of the term "young children" in VAT law. Consequently, VAT relief is subject to a schedule of maximum sizes for clothing and footwear that is based on the children's average size to their 14th birthday. In detail, that means that children with a size 14.5 in collar upwards or wearing jumpers with a 34 in chest upwards, trousers with a 28 in waist upwards or skirts with a 26 in waist upwards will be subject to 17.5 per cent. VAT on the value of those items of clothing.

Alas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, many schoolchildren today do not share the svelte Adonis-like proportions that you and I enjoy. It is a medical fact that children today are larger than when the so-called average figures were devised. Worse still, those outdated schedules positively discriminate against larger children, who may already be suffering from weight problems through no fault of their own. Moreover, today's fashion is to wear baggier outfits.

School outfitters are constantly faced with the absurd situation in which two children of the same age, say 13, are fitted out with the same type of uniform for the same school, and in which one child with a size 14 in collar will enjoy zero VAT on his or her uniform whereas the other, with a size 14.5 in collar—only half an inch more—will be clobbered for the full 17.5 per cent. VAT. There are worse anomalies.

One of the few reliefs is for garments that can be shown as intended to be worn only by members of organisations that cater exclusively for under 14-year-olds. In the case of school uniforms, a prominent crest or logo must be worn. Under 14 means that the relief can apply only to private prep schools, which cater typically for children up to the age of 13. They will attract no VAT. The uniform for typical state secondary schools in my constituency, catering for 12 to 16-year-olds in Worthing and, by definition, usually for less well-off parents, will be subject to full VAT at 17.5 per cent., even when dealing with children of identical size and age.

There are other extreme cases such as that of a firm of hat producers in Nottingham. It produces bonnets for babies which can be liable for the full rate of VAT because it is possible to stretch them across the head of an adult. That is the anomaly in the law.

Last week, I visited one of the outstanding schools in my constituency—Worthing high school. The cost of a uniform at that school is as follows: a jumper is typically £16 or £16.50; a shirt is £9; skirts or trousers are £16; rugby shirts are £17; sports socks are £3.50 and shorts are £7. That adds up to at least £70 before taking account of blazers, shoes and other parts of the uniform. That is £70 or more per child, per kit, as well as the cost of replacement when the uniform wears out.

The outfitter for that school does not stock jumpers of 34 in or below simply because all the children in that school qualify as above the average size and will, therefore, be subject to VAT. There is no choice because the uniform is compulsory. Virtually all the schools in my constituency have compulsory school uniform.

I fully appreciate that the current VAT laws were fashioned to prevent adults from taking advantage of general items of school wear such as plain shirts and trousers. My Bill seeks VAT exemption on those items of school wear that are clearly identifiable as part of a recognised school uniform. I am talking about stripy jumpers made to particular specifications and often involving specially commissioned dyes, jumpers or sports kit bearing the logo or name of the school prominently, those classically dull grey or delightful maroon blazers made famous by the girls of St. Trinian's or those particularly troublesome thick, scratchy football socks guaranteed to bring the wearer a rash on the back of the ankles—I am sure that that brings back fond memories, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As my trip to Worthing high school last week and many other schools in my constituency have confirmed, such items of school uniform are fine and are accepted for school, but by no stretch of the imagination can they be regarded as fashion accessories. No self-respecting pupil in my constituency is likely to be found strutting his or her stuff in one of Worthing's many hot night spots regaled in any of the items I have mentioned.

The law can easily be amended to exempt from VAT those elements of school uniform clearly identified with a particular local school, regardless of the age and size of the children. It could be policed by the production of a school identification card, or the uniform could be ordered through the school.

I hope that the House agrees on the benefits of a school uniform. The Prime Minister has spoken in favour on many occasions. It engenders pride in the school and a sense of identity and discipline. It has been shown that a uniform can lead to better results in schools that have taken it up. A uniform is useful against truancy, it is a good security measure against strangers coming on to school premises and it cuts down the emotional blackmail

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

that children use on their parents because they want the latest designer gear. It also avoids peer pressure about who is the school fashion icon.

The Bill seeks to encourage further the welcome trend back to school uniform. It seeks to correct an anomaly in VAT law which I am sure was never intended and which has placed extra burdens, particularly on the less well-off families who are already faced with the spiralling costs of bringing up young children. It seeks to help less well-off families with several children, particularly prone to wear and tear on their clothes. It seeks to address the absurd advantage implicitly given to children at private prep schools over state secondary schools from the ages of 11 or 12.

My Bill is anti-sexist, anti-agist, anti-sizeist and anti-elitist. As such, I am sure that it will find support from all corners of the House, even from the most politically correct zealots on the Government Benches. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tim Loughton, Mr. Oliver Letwin, Mrs. Theresa May, Mr. Keith Simpson, Mr. David Ruffley, Mr. Andrew Lansley, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Christopher Fraser, Mr. Shaun Woodward, Mr. John Hayes, Mr. David Prior and Mrs. Eleanor Laing.

School Children's Clothing and Footwear (Value Added Tax)

Mr. Tim Loughton accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the zero-rating of the supply of items of clothing and footwear for use only as part of an approved school uniform: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 6 February, and to be printed [Bill 103].

Orders of the Day

National Minimum Wage Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before I call the President of the Board of Trade I must announce to the House that Madam Speaker has decided to apply the 10-minute rule to all Back-Bench speeches throughout the debate.

5.25 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am proud to be able to stand before the House today moving the Second Reading of the National Minimum Wage Bill. The Bill will introduce, for the first time in the United Kingdom, minimum wage protection for all workers and will begin to end the scandal of poverty pay.

This is one of the many areas of politics in which for the Opposition the debate has stood still. They continue—most of them at least—to attack even the principle, let alone the detail, of a national minimum wage as if they and not we had won both the argument and the election. Indeed, this is a good example of the stark differences between us; differences which shape a wholly different approach to Britain's competitiveness.

Increasingly in recent years, the Conservative party has argued that Britain can only and should only seek to compete by aiming to be the cheapest at all costs; aiming to be the bottom of the heap; aiming for the lowest wages and the worst working conditions to be found among our competitors. It was truly a counsel of despair.

The previous Government inherited a country long regarded, certainly since the earliest days of the industrial revolution, as the workshop of the world. Yet the underlying thrust of the policy of the previous Government was to try to turn Britain into the sweatshop, certainly of Europe if not of the world. Fortunately, undercutting the wages and working conditions of countries such as China, for example, was beyond even the previous Government, although heaven knows they tried. In the process they added to changes coming from elsewhere—to a ridiculous extent—and created endemic and high levels of insecurity across every group and profession in the country. Thanks to them, it is well understood that in today's world there is no longer any such thing as a safe job or even a secure profession. Those who thought themselves well-established in their comfortable middle years saw their personal and financial security stripped away and a Government utterly indifferent to their impact on the lives of individuals, of families or of society as a whole.

It is never possible to summarise differences in political philosophy in a sentence or two, but it certainly goes to the heart of the difference between ourselves and the Conservative party that it sought to achieve competitiveness through lowest price whereas we seek to achieve it through high quality. We profoundly believe that Britain's only route to a secure and competitive future

is to remain at the forefront of technological development, of the pursuit of innovation and indeed of quality in all the goods or services that we seek to supply, whether domestically or across the world.

It is against that background that we recognise the role that having basic and fair minimum standards, including fair minimum standards for pay, can contribute.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): The right hon. Lady has already misled the House in her remarks. She said that all workers will be covered. There are four categories exempted in the Bill before the House so I hope that she will correct the record. Will the right hon. Lady tell the House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman might like to reconsider the words he used about the right hon. Lady.

Mr. Redwood: Would you like me to say that the right hon. Lady inadvertently misled the House? The right hon. Lady said that all workers will be covered, but that is not in the Bill before the House.

I want to ask a simple question. Has the right hon. Lady now resolved the conflicts with her ministerial colleagues? Is she telling the House now that every young worker, trainee or otherwise, will be covered by the Bill at a single, standard national minimum rate, or is she still undecided about whether all young workers and trainees will be covered?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know why the right hon. Gentleman bothered to rise to make that point. Obviously, the issue of who is covered by the Bill is something to which I shall come shortly. I am sure that he is well aware that the issue of how young people will be affected is one which we have referred to the Low Pay Commission, and I shall come to that in a minute.

Labour Members support a national minimum wage, not only because it is just, but because it has the potential for real economic benefit, provided that it is set at a sensible rate. Moreover, that is not merely our view, but a view which is attracting growing support across British business and commerce.

The evidence for why we need a national minimum wage is quite clear. Despite the previous Government's assertions, having no floor at all for wages has in itself created considerable problems in the labour market. It has increased costs and pressures on the public purse and it has undermined many efficient and worthwhile companies which are at risk of losing market share as they are undercut by cowboy operators.

In consequence, we see low standards, not merely becoming the norm, but being reflected in the poor quality, or indeed the lack of any training or of development, in the work force, in levels of productivity that still lag far behind our competitors because improved productivity depends crucially on improved levels of investment, and in consequent reductions in the competitiveness of much of British industry.

We have seen welcome improvements of late, both in the statistics on unemployment and in the fact that more people are in work now than in recent years. Nevertheless, after 18 years of a Government who came to power on the slogan "Labour isn't working", we found unemployment 50 per cent. higher than we left it in 1979, even after some 30 or so changes in the way in which it has been measured. Within that total, the number of people who have been unemployed for more than a year is almost double the figure for 1979.

Within that overall picture on employment, the link that the Conservative party claims to detect between low levels of pay and high levels of employment is discredited by much of the evidence of its record in power. Until they were abolished by the previous Government, wages councils provided minimum pay rates for the most vulnerable of our work force, who worked in industries that had a history both of low trade union representation and of low pay. Apart from the existence of the wages councils, legislation such as the fair wage resolution or schedule 11 to the Employment Rights Act 1996 ensured that workers were paid rates at least comparable to those enjoyed by similar workers in competing companies.

The previous Government systematically and step-by-step dismantled all those protections. In 1986, young people were removed from coverage by the wages council system. During the Second Reading debate on the Wages Bill 1986, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) explained that the then Government's aim was

"to create employment opportunities especially for young people"—

and to create—

"an efficient labour market, where there are the minimum of constraints on the rights of employers and employees to agree to offer and accept jobs on contractual terms that suit them both".—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. 796.]

What happened? Certainly, levels of pay fell. But there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that employment among young people actually fell.

Abolition of the councils in 1993 saw earnings in those industries covered, particularly for the new entrants, fall in real terms. But employment in those sectors did not increase relative to the rest of industry. Nor indeed did low pay continue to be confined largely to those areas previously covered by wages councils. Now some 880,000 workers earn less than £2.50 an hour, which is a third of the average hourly rate. Those workers are found throughout the United Kingdom, not just in areas that have traditionally tended to be low paying. There are innumerable examples of people working long hours for a very low hourly rate.

The Low Pay Unit has examples of someone working in a chip shop in Birmingham and taking home 80p an hour, of a factory hand earning £1.22 an hour and a residential home worker earning £1.66 an hour—another example involves a sales clerk in Wrexham earning £1.12 an hour. The recently opened Trades Union Congress hotline has uncovered cases such as that of a waiter paid £12 for an eight-hour shift, during which any tips that he received were taken from him, and a cleaner working in an independent school, who was paid £40 for a 40-hour week.

The consequence of that policy, apart from insecurity and poverty among those in such low-paid work, is a massive cost to the public purse. More than £2 billion will be paid in 1997 in family credit alone to subsidise employers paying wages at those levels. The taxpayer is paying a heavy price for the previous Government's decision to remove any floor on earnings. Not only did that result in poverty wages, but a pay gap was created

[Mrs. Beckett]

between rich and poor which has grown to its largest level since the 1880s; and there has been a growth in inequality which is faster than in any other industrialised country apart from New Zealand.

Moreover, the present position is actually undermining employers who are competitive in any fair marketplace—undermining the quality of the goods and services that they can offer and damaging their competitiveness in consequence. That has been increasingly realised across British business. For example, the Business Services Association recently said:

"A minimum wage would allow reputable companies to compete for business on the grounds of quality rather than price".

The Reed agency survey found that 48 per cent. of employers with fewer than 100 employees were in favour of a national minimum wage, with 27 per cent. thinking that it was a "very good" idea. Not long before the election, the private company DHL, carried out a survey among UK exporters, almost 70 per cent. of whom in their responses to the survey indicated that they were either not opposed to, or directly supportive of, a national minimum wage.

The underlying reason was quite simple. Companies that can compete internationally only on the basis of quality nevertheless almost always need a secure domestic market base. Cowboy operators who undercut that domestic market share undermine the ability to keep and compete on the quality which is essential to obtain orders in the international marketplace. Far from being an aid to British business in its international competitiveness, the lack of any standards and any basis of minimum levels of pay actually turns out to be an impediment.

The case that I have made so far is a case for having any basic standards at all, but it is important to recognise that, within those basic standards, common sense suggests that we should have a single national rate for the minimum wage. Such a wage is a key part of our strategy to enhance employability and to help those at present without jobs to move into work. It will be implemented against a background of tax and benefits reform and of a new deal to promote not just quality employment, but quality training to give people the skills and flexibility that they need to prosper in today's and tomorrow's labour market.

The combination of those policies should open up the world of work for far more people. Today, we have about 1.4 million people out of work at the same time as there are many thousands of job vacancies—particularly in the midlands, as elsewhere, where employers complain of skill shortages which damage the economy's competitiveness, as well as tending to foster inflation.

In many cases, the pay rates on offer in the labour market that we inherited from our opponents are not high enough for people to be able to move into work, and the skills and experience that the unemployed have to offer are often not suitable for the vacancies that continue to exist. We need to build a fresh ladder from welfare to work, and the minimum wage is an important rung on that ladder.

We quickly set to work on the policy. Within 90 days of the general election, we had set up the independent Low Pay Commission, chaired by Professor George Bain, to examine the case for the level at which a minimum wage might be introduced.

Mr. Redwood: Can the right hon. Lady give us some guidance on the following question? Does she think that a waitress on £3 an hour who gets free accommodation and food is better or worse off than a factory worker on £4.50 an hour who is trying to live in central London and has to meet his own expenses for accommodation and food, or a bar steward on £4 an hour in Liverpool who gets free food, but has to pay for his accommodation? Which is better off? Will any of those workers be covered by the Bill?

Mrs. Beckett: I have consistently made it clear that we have no intention of second-guessing the work of the Low Pay Commission. The comparisons that the right hon. Gentleman makes are those which the commission has been set up to address. As I said a moment ago, the commission is taking widespread evidence and those are the issues it needs to consider.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I welcome the fact that the Government have established the Low Pay Commission; my party has long argued for such a body. I am, however, confused. The right hon. Lady argues that common sense leads her to believe that a national minimum wage is the right route. Why, in that case, is she not prepared to let the Low Pay Commission examine the matter and, perhaps, endorse her view?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall come back to that issue in a moment. For the hon. Gentleman to describe his party's support for a minimum wage as long held is slightly flattering. I do not, however, want to intrude on private grief. We have, of course, looked at all the issues, and we have looked carefully at the arguments about different rates of pay and different conditions and circumstances. We have, however, come to the conclusion that it would not be sensible for the Low Pay Commission to spend time examining them.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way on that point. She referred to Professor George Bain. Is she aware of his statement that he would be surprised if there were not some job losses and that the question was whether those jobs would be better lost anyway? Does she agree that it would be better if low-paid jobs did not exist?

Mrs. Beckett: That is not what Professor George Bain said.

Mr. Bercow: It is on the record.

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, Professor Bain's words are on the record and I advise the hon. Gentleman to scrutinise them. I have some experience of his accuracy. I am well aware of what Professor Bain said and it was not as the hon. Gentleman represented it. Professor Bain made it clear, as we have always made it clear, that we could never say, hand on heart, that no one would ever be able to claim—

I stress the word "claim"—that in some way, levels of employment had been affected. Again, I shall come back to that point.

We set up the Low Pay Commission within 90 days of the general election. The Bill will give a statutory framework to the commission's work and if it passes through both Houses, regulations to implement the detail of Government decisions will be introduced in the year ahead.

The terms of reference that we set for the Low Pay Commission indicated that it should take full account of prevailing economic circumstances as well as the circumstances that surround the implementation of the minimum wage itself, such as the changes that we envisage in the tax and benefit system. Those terms of reference also make it clear that we believe that the minimum wage should be a single hourly rate establishing a general wage to apply across the board.

I know that the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) was quoted—he will no doubt correct me in his speech if he was quoted inaccurately—as suggesting that this was a policy of dogma. It has nothing to do with dogma. Even the mention of the interaction between levels of a minimum wage and other aspects of the tax and benefit system makes it clear why we told the Low Pay Commission not to spend time assessing the case for regional or for sectoral rates.

The difficulties of boundary definition would be insuperable. First, we have no clearly defined and long-established regional boundaries as such in the United Kingdom. Secondly, what matters? Is it where someone works or is it where he or she lives? If we considered different regional rates, would they also interact with different sectors? Again, there would be bound to be differences and difficulties of definition which would hugely complicate the administration and, indeed, the costs of introducing a minimum wage. For companies that have employees in more than one region or individual employees who work in more than region, the complications could be enormous.

One issue that is more frequently raised is the treatment of small and growing firms. Although, understandably, there has been some anxiety among representatives of small business, not least because of the extremely distorted information they got from the Conservative party, there is now a growing acceptance even in this area of the economy of the case for a national minimum wage. That was illustrated, for example, at the 1997 conference of the Federation of Small Business where a majority of those who attended voted in favour of a national minimum wage, sensibly negotiated.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): That claim has been made before. Has the right hon. Lady not read the manifesto of the Federation of Small Businesses? It says:

"The Federation is in principle opposed to a statutory minimum wage."

Mrs. Beckett: I can tell the hon. Gentleman categorically that we know that the Federation of Small Businesses passed the resolution I described; that has never been disputed. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry was present in the hall, unlike Conservative party representatives, when the debate was held. There is no doubt that the federation carried such a resolution.

What is important is not only that the federation conference voted in favour of a minimum wage, sensibly negotiated, but that we have again asked the Low Pay Commission to take account of the impact on small firms when it formulates its recommendations.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Why is there no one on the Low Pay Commission who has had first-hand experience at the sharp end of running a small business?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is entirely mistaken and I suggest that he looks again at the composition and membership of the Low Pay Commission. Mr. Dewar is a well-recognised representative of the small business community. The commission is taking evidence from the small business sector and it will take account of the views of small business in its recommendations.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Is this on the same point?

Mr. Bruce: Yes. I understand that the right hon. Lady must make her own case and must, obviously, support what the Labour party has decided. I and my colleagues are, however, confused. The Government moved quickly to say that its new deal would effectively give employers a subsidy of about £2 an hour—£75 a week—to take on a long-term unemployed person. Why is it right for the Government to get people into work by giving a £2 subsidy and yet to say that they will create jobs by bringing the minimum wage upwards? I am confused. Those are both Labour party policies and they seem to contradict each other.

Mrs. Beckett: The policies do not contradict each other. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present in the Chamber earlier; I do not criticise him if he was not because we all have other commitments. I have already made the point that the welfare-to-work programme is the kind of issue that the Low Pay Commission will take into account when it makes its judgment.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that it has never been intended that the welfare-to-work programme should continue in perpetuity. It is a one-off step which the Government have felt forced to take because of the previous Government's total inaction. We inherited a large-scale problem of unemployment, particularly among young people, and we thought it right to take dramatic action to deal with the problem, as we are now doing.

That point brings me to the issue of young people. We have asked the Low Pay Commission to look with particular attention at young people and specifically to consider whether there should be any special treatment for them. We do not want the legislation to provide a disincentive for young people to stay on in education and training, and that is why it is important for the commission to take evidence and carefully to assess the area.

We are, of course, well aware that there are many workers under 26 who are fully as productive as any older worker and who may have family commitments. No decision has yet been made by the Government on

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those issues. We await the Low Pay Commission's recommendations on what exemptions, if any, might need to be made for young people, on whether there might be a lower minimum or minima and in what circumstances those conditions might apply. It is for that reason that we have taken limited powers in the Bill to make exceptions if the Low Pay Commission so recommends and if the Government so decide. All those matters would stand to be laid before this House in the regulations.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I fully understand and welcome the point that my right hon. Friend is making, but there are many exploited young people in this country and many businesses that grow and thrive on that exploitation. I know that she will take that into account, but a marker must be given to the Low Pay Commission that we are concerned about the exploitation of young people.

Mrs. Beckett: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the exploitation of young people, but I know that he shares my view that exploitation of people in the work force of whatever age is damaging and should be resisted. I am mindful of the comment that is sometimes made about the dignity of work, and I share the view that it is always better, if it is at all possible, for people to be in the work force and that work can contribute to self-esteem. However, being brazenly and blatantly exploited does not contribute to anybody's self-esteem: it is damaging, undermining and engenders a high degree of cynicism.

Audrey Wise (Preston): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing the Bill, but will she give an assurance that any regulations that may be made—although I hope they will not be—under clauses 3 and 4 will be brought to the House for debate and vote?

Mrs. Beckett: Of course—I can unreservedly give my hon. Friend that assurance. It would be quite wrong for an issue of such substance not to come before the House and it is the Government's intention that it should do so.

I have referred several times to the work of the Low Pay Commission. The commission includes representatives of employers and workers drawn from a range of sectors and industries. It is undertaking a wide-ranging consultation exercise to obtain views of employers, workers, interested bodies and the general public; and, on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), I know it has taken evidence from a number of young people. It has received a large number of written submissions and undertaken a series of visits throughout the United Kingdom to hear the views of those who seem likely to be directly affected by the legislation.

We expect the commission to report its recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and to me by the end of May 1998, and, following that report, we shall consider the content of the regulations to implement a national minimum wage. Those regulations will set the rate, specify the reference period and determine the method of assessing the minimum wage, including issues such as benefits in kind, to which the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) referred earlier. We have asked the Low Pay Commission to look at all these issues.

The regulations will determine the method of calculation and the make-up of the pay that can be taken into account when assessing whether the national minimum wage has been paid. We recognise that pay today can be made up of a large number of elements, including overtime, performance bonuses, benefits and allowances that are payable for particular working circumstances or which include additional payments for shiftwork, piecework or payments in kind. All those are issues which the Low Pay Commission will consider, on which it will report to us, and on which, once we have reached a decision, we shall frame regulations.

That brings me to the issue of enforcement. There is no point in having a national minimum wage that cannot be enforced, but an efficient regime needs to balance the potential burdens on business of the structure of regulation itself against the need to ensure that individuals receive their rights and are adequately protected; and that the economic as well as the social benefits we envisage flowing from a national minimum wage do indeed ensue. The Bill provides for a flexible approach to enforcement. It allows us to appoint officers to enforce the minimum wage or, if it is thought more sensible, to engage the services of officers of an existing Government Department or agency. In this respect, we are building on existing practices and procedures, given that individual workers already have the right to go to an industrial tribunal to recover wages that have been unlawfully deducted, or to a court for breach of contract.

The Bill provides powers to enable officers to levy financial penalties on employers who fail to comply with an enforcement notice. That should ensure that there is no delay in workers receiving the wages to which they are entitled. We will not tolerate those who refuse or wilfully neglect to pay a worker the minimum wage, or those who fail to keep adequate records or who keep false records. Employers who deliberately flout the law may be guilty of a criminal offence. However, we hope and believe that there will be few employers who would ever face criminal action under this legislation. Responsible companies—the vast majority, who want the cowboys who give them a bad name to be strictly dealt with—have nothing to fear and a great deal to gain.

The popularity of the national minimum wage with the general public is a triumph of decency over dogma. The Conservative party, barely engaging in the real debate about a national minimum wage, has sought from the beginning to use scare tactics as dishonest as they were scurrilous. If memory serves me, Conservative Members said at one time that 750,000 jobs would be lost if ever there was a national minimum wage. As time went on and that argument appeared not to carry weight, the figure rose to ludicrous proportions, resulting in a claim that 2 million jobs would be destroyed if any national minimum wage were introduced.

Those who have been around long enough to remember the introduction of equal pay legislation will remember a remarkably similar debate. I well recall the issue because, at the time, my mother was a trained teacher who had a family of three and an invalid husband to support. She did not receive the same pay as a man in her circumstances. We were told then that the introduction of equal pay legislation would mean that women would simply disappear from the marketplace—something which does not seem to have been a noticeable feature of recent years. In fact, women's pay in real terms and relative to men's

has increased significantly since 1975, when the Sex Discrimination Act was introduced; and between 1975 and 1997 women's participation in the labour market has increased dramatically from 60 to 72 per cent.

Of course, we can never prevent people from claiming that a national minimum wage will cause them to lay off staff, or indeed claiming it as justification for having done so. I remember that, just before the 1992 general election, a fairly major employer was quoted as having written to all its employees to say that, if they were so unwise as to vote Labour and a national minimum wage was introduced, several hundred of them would have to be laid off. Within a few weeks of that election, which resulted, as we all recall, in a Tory Government and no national minimum wage, several hundred of them were nevertheless laid off. There is nothing that we can do about that sort of claim.

However, as I hope we have made clear, there is by no means a simple relationship between the introduction of a national minimum wage and levels of or access to employment. It may be the opinion of Conservative Members that there is a simple link between the two, but the evidence does not support such a claim. Every other developed nation has some form of national minimum wage or statutory wage protection. Conservative Members claim that the existence of such policies in other countries in the EU is merely a reflection of their lack of competitiveness; but the United States, with which Conservative Members are much keener to compare us, has had a minimum wage since 1938. Employment there rose by 18 million in the 10 years to 1994. In a fairly recent example, when the state of California raised the level of its minimum wage, employment also rose. I do not suggest that there is a simple link between the raising of the minimum wage in the United States and employment rising there, as the Conservative party would try to argue if the opposite were true; I simply say that it suggests that the relationship between pay and employment is much more complicated—as are the economic effects of such a policy—than the Conservative party would wish to suggest.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the President of the Board of Trade and acknowledge her generosity in giving way. Does she think that the United States is right to exempt small businesses from the national minimum wage? If she does, why does she not apply such an exemption in the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Beckett: The United States has quite a complex structure for its various minimum wages. That does not alter my point, which is that when the minimum wage there was raised, employment rose too. That completely defeats the Conservative party's argument.

Let me remind the hon. Gentleman—or inform him—of last year's OECD publication, "Annual Employment Outlook", which argued that minimum wages help to defend the social fabric of industrialised nations—not a point which the Conservative party necessarily contests—and that minimum wages do not appear to cause job losses among the most affected groups—women, young people and the unskilled.

Mr. Redwood: The right hon. Lady is generously giving way today. Was the DTI wrong to answer a question by saying that 1 million jobs would be lost if we had a national minimum wage at half average earnings? That answer was calculated before the election by high calibre DTI staff. If she thinks that the DTI was wrong, will she publish all the forecasts of job losses that have been sent to the Department, and an independent assessment by her officials of the job consequences of the minimum wage?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not recall the precise questions quoted by the right hon. Gentleman. I do know, however, that no Government Department would make such an assessment without first being given some criteria on which to work. In all the examples ever quoted by the Conservative party, on this and many other issues, the criteria on which such calculations are made have been set by politicians, Ministers and political advisers in the Conservative party. All civil servants can do then is base their calculations on the guidance they have been given as to the background against which such judgments may be made. Given what we know about the quality of guidance given by the Tory party, there is no substance to the right hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the assumption given to Treasury officials and the DTI before the election was that differentials from top to bottom would be fully restored if a minimum wage were introduced? In other words, a pay rise for a hairdresser would be replicated in percentage terms at the very top, among the fat cats. After the election, however, for no particularly good reason, these same Ministers decided to reduce the assumption to differentials being only half restored from top to bottom—another assumption with no empirical basis.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is correct. I remember a similar example of Tory accuracy. Before the general elections of 1987 and 1992, the Tories decided that if a Labour Government were elected they would immediately increase public spending by £35 billion. On that basis, they asked the Inland Revenue to cost what that would mean if registered purely as an increase in the standard rate of income tax. That resulted in the idea of a 10p increase on the standard rate of tax.

The Conservatives then went to innumerable small businesses and others asserting that it was Labour party policy to put 10p on the standard rate of tax. They stressed how much this would cost people and industries. Before the recent election, I was sent a letter written by an hon. Member—I will not name him to spare his blushes—who had turned this into a fund-raising exercise. He told small businesses in his constituency, on the basis of what he called Inland Revenue figures—they were actually dishonestly compiled by the Tory party—that a Labour Government would cost them £10,000, "so why not give a large sum to my election campaign to prevent the election of a Labour Government?"

The right hon. Member for Wokingham also asked me for an independent assessment by my officials. As he is well aware, no assessment, independent or otherwise, is possible until we have a clear idea from the Low Pay Commission of what it might recommend; thereafter, the Government will have to come to a judgment.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman has asked me in a press release to reveal—I hope that I am not misrepresenting him; I recognise that I am depending on

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press reports—forecasts that we are supposedly suppressing. There are no such forecasts, and it is hard to imagine how the right hon. Gentleman came to think there were. I fear that they are yet another figment of his imagination.

The main issue with respect to a national minimum wage is getting the policy mix right. So long as it is set at a sensible level, taking economic circumstances into account, it can contribute to growth and job creation, while helping to tackle poverty pay and to alleviate the burden on the taxpayer.

The need for such an approach has long been recognised. When the late Winston Churchill introduced legislation in 1909 to set up the trade boards, the predecessors of the wages councils, he said:

"where you have what we call sweated trades, you have no organisation, no parity of bargaining, the good employer is undercut by the bad, and the bad employer is undercut by the worst".

As a result of the former Government's policies, too many British workers still have to work excessive hours to take home a living wage.

Modern companies depend on constructive partnership with their work force. They depend on stimulating confidence and creativity because those are the principal assets enabling them to compete in the global economy, where a competitive edge is so desperately needed. A policy of a national minimum wage will contribute greatly to such developments. That policy is right, it is fair, it is just and it is sensible. It is a clear example of how a Labour Government can and will make a real difference to the lives of people across Britain, contributing to fairness and prosperity for the many, not the few. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.6 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I am delighted that the President of the Board of Trade is in her place for once and has done us the courtesy of coming here—*[Interruption.]* I am about to say something nice about the right hon. Lady—hear me out. I am delighted that, for once, she has put the case for one of the many Bills that her Department is introducing. I am delighted, moreover, that she took so many interventions. It is all welcome progress for the right hon. Lady, who has been such a notable absentee—

Mrs. Beckett: I am indifferent to the rubbish that the right hon. Gentleman spouts. In all the time I have been in this House I have consistently given way to interventions. I have no qualms about taking them at all.

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted to hear it. The right hon. Lady is always courteous in that respect, as I am to her. It is nevertheless difficult to intervene when the right hon. Lady never comes here to speak in the first place. That was the problem that we faced at any rate until the past couple of weeks. It is a rare pleasure to find her here making a case.

Our disappointment is that the right hon. Lady did not answer any of the fundamental questions about the legislation. She will not tell us to whom it will apply, what the rate will be, or how this measure will tackle poor wages. The truth is that she does not know: she has sub-contracted those problems to the Low Pay Commission, but she will not even guarantee that she will accept all the commission's advice.

No one dislikes poverty wages more than I do. It is no part of our case that we should seek to condone low wages—

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): If the right hon. Gentleman does not like poverty wages, why will he not draw a line somewhere? What is a reasonable or decent wage—£2.50, £1.50 or 80p an hour? In short, what constitutes poverty pay?

Mr. Redwood: Our view is that people should be offered a minimum income, not a minimum wage. We set out what we thought that that minimum income should be in our benefit proposals and in the other proposals that we set out over the past 18 years. If the hon. Gentleman's party had done as much as the Conservative party to lift people out of poverty, those people would be a lot better off than they are today.

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): What minimum income would the right hon. Gentleman recommend?

Mr. Redwood: I am happy to do so. The minimum income is set out in the benefit regulations, which we bequeathed to the Labour Government when we left office. We allowed family credit top-ups to those in low-paid employment, reflecting their family circumstances. There is no single minimum, as the Labour party will find out; it depends where one lives, how one lives and what one's responsibilities are. We bequeathed a sensitive system in which we had put in place additional benefits for those who needed more income.

We therefore say: minimum income yes; minimum wage no. We want every family in this country to be able to earn enough from work to lead a decent life. Of course that is our objective, and let no Labour Member deny that or say to the contrary. The Conservative party wants a prosperous country. The issue is how to achieve it. Legislation cannot create prosperity in the way that the Government naively believe; there must be a low-tax, low-regulation economy, full of enterprise and initiative so that small companies can prosper, and more and better jobs are created.

Mr. Pond: If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about poverty and had such well-established policies on a minimum income, will he explain why, under the regime that he represented, those registered as in poverty increased from 5 million to 14 million, and why low pay is now the single most important cause of poverty? Those are the official figures.

Mr. Redwood: That was a wild flight of fantasy from the hon. Gentleman. There are not 14 million people in poverty and we put in place benefits to ensure that everyone had the wherewithal to get food and shelter and the basics for a reasonable life, because that is what happens in a decent society. I deeply resent Labour Members implying that we did not care because we do, and we are very worried tonight that jobs will be lost as a result of this measure.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Some people in my constituency work for 90p an hour. The right

hon. Gentleman said that he wants people to earn enough to get a minimum income. How many hours do my constituents need to work at 90p per hour to raise that minimum? How long a period does the right hon. Gentleman think is reasonable?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman was not listening to what I was saying. I was saying that some wages are too low for decent family life, which is why we introduced benefits to top them up. I should like those wages to be much higher and I have suggestions on how to make them higher. That is exactly what was happening under Conservative policies—we were backing enterprise and lower taxes. The Labour party wants to put taxes up and raise people's pension contributions and tries to make people worse off through higher taxes. I am against that.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Is the right hon. Gentleman happy about jobs in his constituency being advertised at £2 an hour?

Mr. Redwood: I challenge the hon. Gentleman to find a job in my constituency being advertised at £2 an hour.

Mr. Caplin: I have among my notes an advertisement for a job in Wokingham at £2.20 an hour.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has not found a job at £2 an hour. I make another promise to him—

Mr. Caplin: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Redwood: Let me answer the hon. Gentleman's question first, and perhaps he can then get himself out of the mess that he is in. The job that he mentioned at £2 an hour has gone up by 10 per cent. in two seconds. Who knows what it might be by the end of the debate?

I went to the local employment centre in Wokingham the other day—not in search of a job for myself but in search of truth about this issue. I was told that the advice given to employers was not to advertise jobs at below £4 an hour. The labour market is buoyant thanks to the outgoing Conservative Government's policies, and the advice to employers in my constituency wanting to hire more workers is to offer higher rates. I concur with that judgment. I want the same prosperity for other parts of the country as my constituency has been privileged to enjoy under a Conservative Government in recent years. I shall now allow the hon. Gentleman to redeem his foolishness.

Mr. Caplin: If there is a mess, it is of the right hon. Gentleman's making. He is the one in a hole, not me. Does it matter whether the wage is £2 or £2.20? Is he happy for his constituents to be paid £2 or £2.20 an hour?

Mr. Redwood: I have made my position clear. My advice to any constituent thinking of taking that job is that he or she could easily get a better job in Wokingham at a higher rate. That is how a market economy works.

Mr. Thomas Graham (West Renfrewshire): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that thousands of people have lived on poverty wages for the past 18 years? They did not like working all week—40 or 60 hours a week—and then having to go with their begging bowls to the DSS. That is an absolute tragedy. The previous Government would have continued to subsidise folk to go to work. That is not what people in this country want. They want a living wage which will give them the opportunity to stop going to the Government with a begging bowl. That is how to improve the quality of life and of products in Britain. Had the previous Government realised that, Conservative Members would not be sitting where they are now.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is making a rather good point beneath that provocative exterior. He is saying to those who keep their jobs after this legislation has gone through that the benefit will accrue mainly to the Treasury rather than to the individuals concerned, because for every extra pound that they get from their employer they will lose a lot in benefit withdrawal. That is one of the difficulties of the scheme that the Government are putting forward: it will help the Treasury more than it will help individuals working in the private sector. It will also hit the Treasury in many other ways, however, and we shall all end up losing.

Mr. Bercow: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the research by Stewart and Swaffield, who found that between 1991 and 1993, 9.3 per cent. of the work force were on low pay but only 2 per cent. of the workers involved suffered low pay for the whole three-year period? Does that not utterly demolish the Government myth that there is a huge and permanent pool of poorly paid people in Britain? There is not.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When I was a student I worked for much less, in the money of the day, than the national minimum that the Labour party now has in mind. I was happy to do so because I knew that it would not be a permanent condition. I am delighted that it was not. Many people accept jobs that are not well paid at the beginning of their careers or working lives because they live at home and do not have the same high expenses. They then gain experience and become more useful to a future employer, and go on to get better jobs. The best way to get a good job is to have had a not-so-good job and work one's way up. What the Labour party is trying to do is to kick away the ladder of opportunity for many people who wish to climb it.

We believe in the state ensuring a minimum income rather than insisting on a minimum wage. That is why, when we were in office, we introduced housing benefit, family credit and other benefits, which helped those in low-income work as well as those who were out of work. We reflected family responsibilities because we considered that important. We shall continue to support the payment of benefits to those in work if their wages are not sufficient.

If only we could legislate to ensure good wages for all without loss of jobs, but our case today is that we cannot because it will not work. The Government fear that it will not work and they are deeply divided, as we see from the leaks over the all-important detail of how wide ranging a minimum wage should be. Many young people, skilled

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people and disabled people will lose their jobs or be prevented from getting a job if the wrong decisions are made and if the Bill goes through in a clumsy form.

The Labour manifesto and election campaign clearly stated that the national minimum wage would apply to everyone. That is how the President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry wrongly began her remarks this evening. She did not suggest that any region, group or age band would be excluded. When we objected that that could prevent some young people from getting a job at all, Labour spokesmen in those broadcasts just asserted that we were wrong.

We now know that the Minister without Portfolio, who is not without influence in the Government, takes a different view, as we can see from leaked letters to colleagues and from his remarks to the Labour party conference. He thinks that the rate should be kept low and exemptions arranged to prevent too many jobs being lost. He was reported as saying that a different rate for young workers was

"the right course of action".

His subsequent "clarification" still leaned heavily in favour of no single national minimum for all. His thinking merely echoes that of the Deputy Prime Minister, who in opposition let slip the following, in more vernacular language than one usually gets from the Minister without Portfolio:

"And I knew the consequences"—

of the national minimum wage—

"were that there'd be some shakeout, any silly fool knew that, and it was in one of our documents that that would be one of the consequences. . . When I made that statement"—

I continue to quote—

"it was on Sky TV, it was then was told by the spin doctors that we're not saying that".

The Deputy Prime Minister went on to reveal his battle with the spin doctors—deeply intriguing. He summed up magisterially, in a way that the President of the Board of Trade would be well advised to heed:

"I've said since I don't like people giving stories of sound bites, avoiding difficulties by saying 'Isn't this the easy option, there's no difficulties', you lack credibility if you don't point out some of the difficulties of some of the options you propose. That's essential for the credibility of myself"—

I speak for the Deputy Prime Minister on this occasion—

"but also more important the Labour party. "

What an extraordinary confession: the Deputy Prime Minister himself says that jobs will be lost if a national minimum wage is implemented. The Deputy Prime Minister says that the Labour spin doctors were wrong to cheat the people by pretending that there were no such problems. The Deputy Prime Minister recommended that a clean breast be made of the job losses, so that Labour would be telling the public the truth. If only the right hon. Lady would follow the advice of her senior and illustrious colleague, we would have a much better debate today.

Mr. Sheerman: The Government obviously realise that the matter is complicated and are consulting, doing their homework and trying to tackle the legislation as best they can. That is better than any legislation that the previous Government produced; yet derision from the Opposition is all the thanks that the Government get. After 18 years of legislation being pushed through the House without consultation, this legislation will be right, it will be well researched, and it will be done well. That is what the Opposition cannot stomach.

Mr. Redwood: We are trying to clarify the complexities and difficulties and to ask questions, in the hope that that will lead to better policy. We heard today from the right hon. Lady that she intends to blunder on with the policy, with no assessment of the job consequences, no knowledge of who will be covered by it, with certain exceptions already excluded in the Bill, and no view yet on what the rate should be.

The Opposition argue that Ministers should be forming a view on those matters, and should be offering the proper information for this debate and the national debate that it could lead. We would willingly help in that debate. We will debate seriously in the interests of people who want to keep their jobs, and in the interests of those who want higher pay. We are happy to do that, but unfortunately the right hon. Lady is showing her usual indecision and lack of interest in the detail of her Department, so she veers round the issue and does not answer the questions.

The right hon. Lady's first guidance to the Low Pay Commission implied that there would be no exemptions. Her subsequent letter suggested that the commission consider exempting all young people. Tonight, she began by saying that there would be no exemptions, although there are some already, then she wandered off and said that perhaps some young people could be left out. Confusion is endemic, and that is sad when so much is at stake for the people whom the Government claim that they want to help.

Today, we need answers to these crucial questions: how will wages be calculated? Who will qualify for the minimum wage, and who will be exempted? How many jobs are at risk? What will happen to differentials? Will the Treasury or the individual gain more from higher private sector pay? What will be the total cost to the taxpayer in the public sector and as a result of the possible bigger job losses? How will the health service pay for the increased pay bill? Will more money be made available? What is the level likely to be? How can we judge the Bill without knowing the main point—the rate that the Government are recommending?

First, we need to know more about the coverage of the measure. It is vital to know how young people are to be treated. Is a young person one who is under 19, or under 21? What about the wide-ranging definition offered by the right hon. Lady in her letter to the Low Pay Commission, of under 26? Are trainees to be exempted? We have heard different views expressed by Ministers. How is a trainee to be defined?

Are the disabled to receive special treatment—the Bill leaves open that possibility, as I read it—or will this heartless Government merely cut their benefits and put at risk some of their jobs? That is an important issue. My party's view is clear: do not cut the benefits for the disabled. I wish that the right hon. Lady could say the same thing.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that my right hon. Friend is wrong to consult? If, at this stage of the process, she

were to lay down the answers that he seeks, would not the right hon. Gentleman, rather than congratulating her, condemn her for the policy measures that she was putting forward? Does he think that it is right to consult all parts of industry or not?

Mr. Redwood: It is admirable for Governments to consult, but the usual practice is to consult first and legislate second.

Mr. Woolas: The right hon. Gentleman has conceded that he agrees with the minimum income. In light of that principle, is it not entirely honourable and correct to consult on what proportion of that income should be made up of wages? He cannot have his cake and eat it.

Mr. Redwood: I am happy for the Government to consult. They said that they believed that they could introduce a minimum wage with no job losses. We are sceptical. They should consult to get proper advice, and they should legislate, if they must, when they have finished their consultation. It is preposterous for them to present the Bill tonight with none of the crucial issues resolved, so that we cannot have a proper debate.

Mr. Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept the following statement—not from me, but from a briefing from the Confederation of British Industry, which many hon. Members have seen? It states:

"The CBI believes that there is little evidence that the rates set by the Wages Councils in the 1980s and early 1990s caused job losses. A minimum wage set in line with Wages Council rates, uprated to today's prices, would be unlikely to cause significant damage but would still cover around 10 per cent. of all employees."

Does my right hon.—does the right hon. Gentleman accept that?

Mr. Redwood: I thought that I was about to become the hon. Gentleman's Friend, but he pulled back in the end. The CBI states clearly in its evidence:

"Even a modest minimum, set around the £3 mark, could lead to job losses unless wage differentials are squeezed."

The CBI believes that wage differentials should not be squeezed.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is not the question who should be consulted? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Low Pay Commission's research paper, which quotes an article heading:

"Pay panel dominated by Labour economists"?

Six of the nine people are university economists who have a strong Labour background, or are from the trade unions. Can we get a balanced view, when the people who provide the jobs are the business community, not the panel?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. We all object to the absence from the Low Pay Commission of anyone with hands-on experience of running a small business.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I must make progress, as many other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

We need to know more about the Bill's coverage, as I was saying. Are older people already in receipt of pensions to be exempted from the measure? Why did the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), who is present tonight, tell us that there would be no sectoral or regional exemptions, when some are already recorded in the Bill?

The Bill exempts share fishermen, some merchant seamen and charity workers. It leaves open the possibility of exempting others. Are we witnessing a titanic struggle between old Labour, who want a high minimum wage for all, with no exemptions, and new hard Labour, who do not? We still do not know which side the President is on, because she sits on the fence and hopes that she will not have to answer the questions.

Are the Government aware that in many foreign countries that have adopted minimum wage legislation, the list of exemptions has grown year by year as different groups have come to their legislators and said, "Please exempt us, because we think that it is doing more damage to job prospects than it is doing good in raising poor wages"? We have already heard a powerful exchange on the United States experience, with a much lower rate, I think, than the Government are considering—$5.15 an hour—and a raft of exemptions, including all of small business, the sector which generates most of the additional jobs in that economy and in ours.

I wonder whether Ministers are to be exempted from the legislation. We have at least two Ministers who receive no pay at all for their jobs—the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, and the Paymaster General. In view of what we have learnt about how they have been obtaining money from offshore trusts in the past or shares or other advantages, I wonder whether it would be better if all that is owing to them were repatriated, they paid UK tax on it and we paid them a ministerial salary. I wonder whether it might be suitable to amend the Bill to ensure that Ministers receive a salary. However, in all other respects, arrangements for Ministers should remain on the same basis as for everyone else. I think that blind trusts and offshore trusts are proving problematic for the Government.

We also need to know how pay will be defined. The right hon. Lady and I had a vaguely interesting exchange a little earlier during which I think that she got into a muddle. I repeat that question. Does the right hon. Lady think that a waitress on £3 an hour with free accommodation and meals is better or worse off than a factory worker on £4.50 an hour and no extras living in central London or a bar steward on £4 an hour with free food who lives in Liverpool? The right hon. Lady said that all those issues would be examined by the Low Pay Commission and that a judgment of Solomon would be arrived at. I ask her to think again: she has ruled out the Low Pay Commission's considering any regional differences.

The right hon. Lady must surely understand—although she has a grace-and-favour residence at present—that living accommodation in central London is a lot more expensive than accommodation in Liverpool. Does that matter? Does it not mean that a particular rate of pay in London does not buy nearly as much as the same rate of

[Mr. Redwood]

pay in Liverpool? Would it not be more sensible and sensitive to reflect that fact in the legislation that she proposes?

Mr. Woolas *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has attempted to make several points, and I have answered all his queries. I must now make progress as other hon. Members wish to participate in the debate.

The right hon. Lady needs to tell us who will be better off and who will be covered by the legislation. Will she correct her previous answer and confirm that the Low Pay Commission cannot take account of regional differences, because she has ruled that out?

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): If the right hon. Gentleman is arguing that there should be differential wages because of different costs in the regions, does that logic apply also to benefits? Should there be different rates of benefit regionally?

Mr. Redwood: To the extent that housing benefit is geared to the cost of housing, that is exactly what we have at present. This Government and the previous Government accepted the case for higher wages in London: it is called "London weighting". I find it difficult to understand the right hon. Lady's argument that it is impossible to define regionally different groups of workers who might need different levels of remuneration. The Government do that all the time when paying their workers. The right hon. Lady should rethink that issue. Is London weighting wrong and should it be abolished under the new ruling? Perhaps the Government should consider differential rates in the context of a minimum wage in order to reflect the logic that governs the way in which they pay their staff.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who has been generous in giving way. Does he believe that there should be differential rates for family credit? In August 1996, there were 8,000 claimants of family credit in his Wokingham constituency. According to my calculations, that represents about 12.2 per cent. of the electorate—which is a high percentage. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that those people should have differential rates? What would he do for those family credit claimants in his constituency?

Mr. Redwood: I am rather sceptical of the figures offered by the hon. Lady. I have received no complaints about the way in which family credit is paid, and I do not think that it affects as many constituents as the hon. Lady suggests. We left behind a system that we thought was right. We applied differentials in the way that I have described that we believed adjusted, more or less, to the different pattern of costs and living expenses around the country. We now hear that the Government do not like that: they wish to treat some people much better than others according to a lottery of where they happen to live. We think that that is extremely unfair.

As we have made clear, our principal worry is job losses. The right hon. Lady did not answer properly my question about Department of Trade and Industry figures that were produced before the election. Of course there are assumptions underlying those figures. An assumption was revealed in the question, which referred to half national average wages and half differential restoration—not full differential restoration as the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) would have us believe. The answer was calculated by independent officials in whom I have the utmost confidence on those sorts of issues.

If the right hon. Lady would like to offer a different set of assumptions or if she has found an error in the way in which the officials calculated the figures, I invite her to correct the figures or provide alternative figures based on her alternative assumptions. We can then debate the matter properly. It is unacceptable for the right hon. Lady to produce a piece of legislation that many in this country believe will destroy many jobs and then wash her hands of the matter by saying, "I have no idea whether any jobs will be lost. I'm not going to calculate any figures and, if there are any figures in the Department, I'll make sure that they are all suppressed."

Incidentally, hon. Members are not allowed to table questions about that issue because we are told that it is hypothetical. The previous Government did not regard it as such. This Government claim to believe in greater openness. So why is a whole serious of questions—which are very germane to an important policy pledge by the Government—blocked off when the previous Government were happy for that and similar issues to be out in the open?

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Did the right hon. Gentleman believe that the introduction of equal pay legislation would lead to job losses? Does he have any evidence that it did so?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Lady will find no remarks by me about that subject on the record, so I am afraid that her point is not well made. She did not supply a quotation by me on that subject because she could not find an embarrassing one.

Professor Bain warned of job losses, and that danger is reflected in the testimony and evidence coming from industry after industry—to which my hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) hopes to refer if he catches the eye of the Chair later in the debate. The right hon. Lady claims that the Low Pay Commission has all the wisdom and that, in due course, it will arrive at the right answers. However, she will not tell us whether she will endorse the Low Pay Commission's findings or whether she will overturn its advice. That implies that the right hon. Lady has a view on what those answers will be.

If the right hon. Lady were entirely independent and had no knowledge about what the Government should do, she could tell us tonight that she will accept all the recommendations offered by that group of wise men and women whom she has assembled at the Low Pay Commission. Her reluctance to do so shows that there are limits on their decisions. Would it not be better for the right hon. Lady to tell the House and the Low Pay Commission tonight what limits apply to its considerations so that it is not put in the embarrassing position of supplying advice that she is unable to accept?

If we look at the bigger picture, we can see that Labour is bad for business. The policies that it espouses will destroy jobs. The right hon. Lady's policy on the brewing industry has already lost 1,500 jobs directly, as one of the chief executives in that industry recently put on record. Many more jobs will be lost in manufacturing and exporting.

Mrs. Beckett: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that every commentator, apart from the gentleman to whom he referred, suggested that, for good or ill, if I had made a different decision, twice as many jobs would have been lost. No one—apart from the individual whom the right hon. Gentleman quotes—suggested that the impact on employment would have been different and that no jobs would have been lost if I had made a different decision.

Mr. Redwood: The fact remains that the person who said that was the one who had to sign the redundancy notices—he took a very dim view of the right hon. Lady's decision.

Other people have provided some interesting testimony on that subject. Mr. Michael Hindley, Labour MEP for Lancashire South, adopts a global perspective. He says that the single currency will lead to actual cuts in wages and he strongly attacks the Government's policy of backing what he calls the "corporatist liberal-democratic state" as viewed through Brussels. He believes that the Government's economic and constitutional policies will lead not to higher wages, but to lower wages.

I see the right hon. Lady frowning—she obviously does not agree with that view expressed by a senior Labour figure. I suspect that she is also not happy with Mr. Tim Pendry from Labour Reform. He makes it clear that the speeches made at the Labour party conference were "triumphs of mental vacuity"—many Conservatives would agree with that wise judgment. He goes on to say that he thinks that the Government will let down the values that the left believes in, and that he is prepared to split the party if necessary because he has no faith in those on the Government Front Bench. *[Interruption.]* The Conservative party is extremely happy under its new leadership, and we know exactly what we think about these issues. It was the Labour party displaying the splits last week—and I think that there are plenty more where they came from. We have seen that again today, and I trust that we shall see it during this evening's debate. Many Labour figures feel that it would be wrong to exempt any group, and wrong also to have anything other than a high national minimum wage, and never mind the consequences. They think that the issue of decency is more important than that of full employment. I happen not to agree with that position, but I understand it. It is a reasonable socialist position for Labour Members to advance.

Others, perhaps including the right hon. Lady and certainly the Minister Without Portfolio, believe that it would be wrong to take action that could damage job prospects and destroy opportunity when the Government are making so much about the need for people to get any sort of job so as to get off benefit. They are saying, in other words, that such action should not take place. It is clear that the split will become worse. The right hon. Lady was unable to answer any of my questions because the split is already so lethal to her party.

A national minimum wage in the private sector, apart from destroying jobs, will help the Treasury rather more than those who are in employment. I pray in aid none other than the Secretary of State for Health, who says:

"The national minimum wage will help to reduce the £4 billion which taxpayers must contribute towards benefits that make up, in part at least, for the low wages paid by the worst employers."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 264.]

Exactly. Much of the benefit will go to the Treasury on that account, but the Treasury has an unspecified and huge bill in respect of public sector wages, and worse still as a result of redundancies and lost jobs.

We want some answers. We want more jobs, not fewer. We want a proper enterprise economy. We also want decent living standards by backing that enterprise economy. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose the Bill.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a rather distressing point of order. We are led to understand that, since the debate commenced this afternoon, the police have issued a warrant for the arrest of a Member on one of the most grave charges that exists—attempting to pervert the course of justice.

Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, received any indication from the Leader of the House about whether she will make a short statement at 7 o'clock on the position of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), including what rights and interests he still has in this place? Will the right hon. Lady clarify the situation? Is the hon. Gentleman entitled to attend the House although a warrant has been issued for his arrest, if he is given bail? I think that the House needs the hon. Gentleman's position to be clarified. We need to know what the situation is with the hon. Member for Govan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I have received no indication that such a statement is to be made.

6.42 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to an important debate—indeed, it will affect hundreds of thousands of workers. I am pleased also to see my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) in his place. I hope that he will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the light of his 17 years of service in the Low Pay Unit and especially his time as national director. That background signifies his belief in the importance of the issue that is before us.

Before I came to the House, I was a full-time official of the National Union of Public Employees, which represented low-paid workers in the national health service and local government. It was always that union's policy to campaign for a national minimum wage. I was happy to be engaged in that fight for decent wages for the union's members.

It was indeed a fight, as some of my hon. Friends know. The union's policy was not that of the Trades Union Congress or the Labour party at that time. Happily, the union's campaign has borne fruit. Its policy is now that of the TUC and the Labour party, and here we are on the Floor of the House discussing a Government Bill that will soon, we hope, be secured as an Act. The measure will reduce the inequalities in the wages system.

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

During my time in this place, I have raised the problems of low pay, especially in the Greater Manchester area. I was able to highlight some of the low-wage problems in the area thanks to the magnificent work of the local low pay unit as far back as 1974, when a debate on low pay took place in the House. I referred to the shocking discrepancy between the rate of pay of the average worker in my constituency and the rate in the rest of the country; to low-wage earners in the north-west and to rates in the south-east.

Little has changed since those times. Average gross weekly earnings in Stalybridge and Hyde are now £308.40; in the rest of England and Wales they are £370.70. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade clearly spelt out that the Bill is about a national minimum wage with no regional exemptions, no special sector rates and no derogations for companies.

I am not suggesting that the Bill is perfect. I am sure that others will join me in taking that view. I know that Gabrielle Cox, the co-ordinator of the Greater Manchester low pay unit, is concerned about one or two issues, including the possibility that under-25s might be paid a lower rate merely because of their age. In addition, there is no clause that states that the minimum wage will be uprated annually. There is no specific commitment to an overtime rate after a specified number of hours. However, this is still a good Bill. I have no doubt that the issues raised by the Greater Manchester low pay unit will be aired in Committee.

I wish especially to refer to the problems in the fastest growing sector in the economy—tourism, leisure and hospitality. For about five years, until the general election, I was the Opposition spokesman on sport and tourism—as the House knows. I was concerned about the low pay in that sector, especially hospitality. With that in mind, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who is now the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I persuaded my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when Leader of the Opposition, specifically to pledge a place on the Low Pay Commission for a representative of the tourism and hospitality industries. That person, in the form of Stephanie Monk of the Granada group, is a capable voice on the commission for those industries.

While giving the Government due credit for honouring their pledge, perhaps I may say how commendable it is that within 90 days of taking office they established the Low Pay Commission. Today, we have a Bill to discuss which, when enacted, will give much comfort and relief to many low-paid workers. Of course, the level at which the minimum wage is set must be sustainable, but that must not be any reason for appeasing the worst of employers, all of whom would be willing to accept the barest increase.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: I shall not give way because of the shortage of time.

I am pleased that in the tourism sector most employers have welcomed the Government's proposals. Peter Moore, the managing director of Center Parcs and a member of the English tourist board, has publicly stated that paying low wages in the service sector is a "false economy". Michael Jolly, the chief executive of the Tussauds group, is also a proponent of a minimum wage. David Quarmby, the chairman of the English tourist board and the British Tourist Authority, also believes that the time has come for a sensible minimum wage to be introduced.

Others in the industry think likewise—such as Garry Hawkes, the chief executive of Gardner Merchant and president of the British Hospitality Association. He referred to a survey that showed that 84 per cent. of hospitality staff and, more important, 65 per cent. of their employers, support a statutory minimum wage. Mr. Hawkes went on to say:

"This is not about altruism—it makes sound business sense to pay high wages because I get good quality, highly motivated people".

Gary Crossley, in an editorial comment in *Caterer and Hotelkeeper*, stated:

"Employers that are worried about staff shortages yet are unable or unwilling to increase basic rates of pay would benefit from taking a closer look at what the more enlightened employers say about pay and related awards. Doing nothing could cost you the best staff and hurt you professionally in the long run."

These comments come from people at the sharp end of the industry, which in the past has been described—by one of my hon. Friends, among others, but wrongly—as a Mickey Mouse industry. When the Bill becomes law, that will be seen as an inaccurate description.

There are those in tourism who are still not convinced of that to which I have drawn attention. They should look to New Zealand, for example, following implementation of a minimum wage. The effect on travel and tourism was almost immediate. Its introduction increased the status of the service sector and there was increased investment in remuneration and training of the work force. Levels of productivity and customer awareness have also increased.

Low pay in the tourism industry is probably best summed up by the English tourist board, which states:

"A well remunerated, well motivated and well trained workforce is of key importance in achieving the level and consistency of quality of service necessary to compete successfully in today's competitive markets."

It seems that the tourism industry, long seen by many as a bad payer, recognises that to compete with our major competitors to maintain and improve its global position it has to create a wages and conditions structure that will assist in that endeavour. By backing the Government's minimum wage policy, it will be able to do just that.

My earnest desire is to see the public employees I used to represent in local government and the health service improve their lot. I want the same for people in my constituency who work in the tourism and hospitality sectors, such as the 23-year-old woman working as a waitress and bar worker earning £1.60 an hour after one year's service, the 27-year-old male waiter earning £2.92 an hour—the wages council rate in 1993 when it was abolished—and the 32-year-old kitchen porter earning £2.50. There are many more like them.

As from the autumn of last year, no fewer than 1,500,000 of the 2,300,000 employees in the north-west were earning less than £4 per hour. That is the scale of the problem we are discussing. When the Bill is passed, as surely it will be, I hope that for these people, in the words of our campaigning song, things can only get better.

6.50 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The key issues that we should debate tonight are as follows. Do the Government's proposals start to address the injustice of poverty wages, which are trapping millions in benefit dependency, and the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor? Do they tackle the lack of regulation that allows cowboy employers to undercut competitors by paying poverty wages, topped up by benefits at the expense of the taxpayer? Do they provide a route for legislation to put a floor under poverty wages without running the risk of creating instability in local and regional economies and job markets?

In that final area, the Government's proposals are deficient. They appear to be refusing to consult on the dangers that many people consider inherent in imposing a rigid and inflexible national minimum wage.

We welcome the Government's decision to set up a Low Pay Commission. The Liberal Democrats have argued for some time—certainly far longer than the Labour party—that a Low Pay Commission should be set up. We welcome the concept of its having statutory powers and being able to act independently of government. Although the Government have recognised the good sense of setting up a Low Pay Commission, they seem to insist on handcuffing it to the masthead of a rigid national minimum wage.

The Government have excluded examination of regional variations from the Low Pay Commission's deliberations—for all sorts of reasons. If they are so confident in their argument, surely they would welcome an independent endorsement from the Low Pay Commission. What are they afraid of?

There are some proposals that we welcome. The Liberal Democrats have long believed that part-time and home workers should be protected in a similar manner to full-time employees and we welcome the part of the Bill that deals with that. We believe that that protection should apply in particular to women, who form the largest proportion of workers who suffer from poverty wages.

However, there seems to be an air of confusion about the Government's proposals for excluding workers under 26. Although there is a case for paying workers who are undergoing subsidised training less, there is no case for paying those who are just as productive as their peers less because they happen to be younger. The abiding principle, surely, should be that equal work deserves equal pay.

The case for putting a floor under poverty wages is clear. The scourge of low pay exists in every corner of the United Kingdom. More than 5 million people earn less than £4 an hour. Of those, nearly 3.5 million earn less than £3.50 an hour and close to 2 million earn less than £3 an hour. Britain is the low pay capital of Europe. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports that while in most European cities around 13 per cent. of employees are on low pay, in the United Kingdom the figure is 20 per cent. That is not a record of success; it is a shameful record of economic failure.

Mr. Fallon: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that Britain is the low-pay capital of the world, is it the Liberal Democrats' position that rates in Cornwall should be even lower?

Mr. Chidgey: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? I said Europe, but I take his point. That is why we are putting the argument as strongly as we possibly can to persuade the Government to consider regional variations throughout our economy and to take account of them in the Low Pay Commission's deliberations.

During the past 25 years, the gap between the rich and the poor has grown dramatically. It is now greater than at any time at least since the second world war. The gap is continuing to grow—faster than in almost every other industrialised country.

The Rowntree inquiry on income and wealth found that the wages of the lowest paid 10 per cent. of men in the 1990s were lower in real terms than they had been in 1975. Between 1979 and 1990, income growth for the richest family type—childless couples—was three times that of the poorest, the lone parent families. One in five of the population now live in households with less than half the average income. One in four children live in poverty.

Hon. Members will know only too well the effects of wage poverty, which we see every week in our constituency surgeries—people trapped in poverty, living in squalid housing, struggling to survive on benefits, yet unable to escape into work that pays enough to lift them out of the benefit trap. It does not affect just lone parents and those with low skills. The recession under the previous Government has left tens of thousands of casualties: people whose jobs disappeared and people whose homes were repossessed, leaving them with massive negative equity and the misery of a life on benefits.

I shall give just one example—I am sure that hon. Members will have many others in mind. My constituent, Mr. Taylor, in Eastleigh, was paid £36,000 a year—a good salary—as a financial services adviser. He is in his 30s, is happily married with four children and lived in his own three-bedroom home. That was before his job disappeared, before his home was repossessed and before he was left with negative equity of £33,000, forcing him into bankruptcy and the trauma of moving his family into two rooms in a hostel for the homeless—but not with the family pets, of course, because they are not allowed in hostels. Try explaining to the children why their pet dog and cat cannot come with them and have to be put down. That was Mr. Taylor's lowest point.

Mr. Taylor did not give up. He is a worker—a trier. After six months, he found a full-time job as a night security guard. Working up to 16-hour shifts at a rate of £3 an hour, he managed to bring home £157 a week to support a family of four children—but of course it does not, and his entitlement in income support and housing benefit added another £150; just about the same as he brought home in pay.

As hon. Members will know, there are tens of thousands of families like Mr. Taylor's who are caught in the poverty trap. The cost to the taxpayer for family credit, income support, housing and council tax benefits is running at almost £3 billion per year. Every taxpayer is paying the equivalent of £120 a year to subsidise low-pay employers. It cannot be right for cowboy firms to pay poverty wages, knowing that they will be topped up by state benefits at the expense of the taxpayer.

The case for tackling the injustice of poverty wages and reducing the burden on the taxpayer is clear. The Government are right to seek to introduce regulation to put a floor under poverty wages. Without regulation,

[Mr. Chidgey]

cowboy firms will continue to pay poverty wages and undercut the cost of their competitors. Without regulation, millions will find no escape from the poverty trap and the taxpayer will continue to pick up the bill.

Mr. Prior: Will the hon. Gentleman please tell the House what he thinks the minimum floor should be?

Mr. Chidgey: The whole point of the Low Pay Commission is to assess independently those minimum rates. I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to emphasise that to those of his hon. Friends who do not fully grasp what the Bill seeks to achieve.

The classic example of the effect of removing low pay protection came after the Conservative party's abolition of the wages councils in 1993. We were told that their abolition would create jobs. A year before their abolition, 17,800 new jobs were created in wages council sectors; the year after their abolition, only 5,000 jobs were created. Average wages grew only 1.7 per cent. in the wages council sectors, compared with a 3 per cent. rise in the non-wages council sectors. In the hotel sector, wages have fallen in real terms since 1993. The wages of women workers in particular have fallen the most and they are now £180 a year worse off.

It is clear that the minimum wage rates established by wages councils revealed no evidence of job losses or an increase in unemployment. The United Kingdom—

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chidgey: No, I have already given way many times.

The United Kingdom is the only country in western Europe without some form of minimum wage protection. In many countries, minimum wage rates are flexible by sector or region, and where they are flexible there is little or no evidence that they impact on wage inflation or unemployment.

The experience in America has already been mentioned. Time is short, so I shall not repeat it, but it is clear from research there that there is no evidence that a minimum wage rate has led to an increase in unemployment. In six out of seven studies undertaken in regions as diverse as New Jersey, Texas and California, employment in the low wages sector increased—in one case by as much as 20 per cent. More than 100 eminent American economists have given strong support to a fair minimum wage. They specifically reject the argument that jobs will be lost. They conclude that a fair minimum wage has a positive effect on the market, on workers and on the economy.

The key factor is the level at which the rate is set and whether regional variations are necessary to avoid the risk of destabilising local economies. The Government are right to establish the independent statutory Low Pay Commission, but they are wrong to exclude the analysis of regional variation from its terms of reference, turning down the request of the commission chairman himself.

There is a clear case for regulation to attack the growing gap between the rich and the poor; to stamp out cowboy firms paying low wages, knowing that they will be topped up by benefits at the taxpayers' expense; and to put a floor under poverty wages, providing minimum wage protection, not just for full-time workers but for part-time workers, home workers and, in particular, for women.

Ignoring the widespread and genuine concern that a national minimum wage, rigidly imposed, will destabilise the economies in our poorest regions smacks of arrogance or dogma. The Government claim that there is no significant variation across the regions in the proportion of workers on low pay. If they are so sure, why will not they release their data to the Low Pay Commission and let it review the case independently?

It is important to take account of concerns raised about rigid national minimum wage rates. Warwick university's analysis of regional variations in pay and the cost of living caused it to come out strongly in favour of regionally varied minimum wages. It found that a surprisingly high number would be affected by a national minimum wage. As many as 25 per cent. of workers in some areas would be affected by a minimum wage of £3.50.

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chidgey: No, I must press on.

A national minimum wage as low as £3 would still affect 10 per cent. of workers. The Warwick university study was particularly concerned about the threat to youth unemployment if training costs of younger workers were not accommodated—a point which the Government appear to concede. The study also found that in small firms a national minimum wage of £4 would increase staff costs by as much as 18 per cent. in some areas, whereas in London staff costs would increase by only 7 per cent.

If hon. Members are not prepared to accept the economists' figures, let us consider the TUC's analysis. It found that 2.5 million full-time workers earn less than £4 an hour and that 1.5 million earn less than £3.50 an hour. Its figures show that around 7 per cent. of full-time workers in the south-east earn less than £4 an hour, but that across the other regions the figure was 14 per cent.—twice as high as in the south-east.

If hon. Members are not happy with the TUC figures, they can consider the data provided in answer to my parliamentary questions, the accuracy of which surely no one would doubt. According to the new earnings survey data provided by the Office for National Statistics, about 6.4 per cent. of full-time workers in the United Kingdom earn less than £3.50 an hour, which is close to the TUC's figure of 1.5 million.

The ONS figures show that, in the south-east, twice as many workers as in London earn less than £3.50 an hour. In Wales, the west midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside, the figure is three times as high. In the north-east, it is 3.5 times as high. One has to conclude that there is more than a suspicion of a regional variation in those wage rates.

Anyone who is still not convinced has only to look at the differences between the lowest rates of pay in Government Departments in London and in the regions. Answers to my parliamentary questions show that, for 11 Departments, the average lowest rate of pay in the regions is £3.50—in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, it is £3.25—yet the average lowest rate of pay in London is £4.30. In the Ministry of

Defence it is £4.03. In 11 Departments, the lowest average rate of pay in London is 25 per cent. higher than in the regions. In some cases, the difference is more than a third. Those differences clearly reflect differences in living costs between London and the regions. Moreover, with seven out of 11 Departments paying the lowest rate of less than £3.50 an hour, the Government are a low pay employer. I trust that the Government will exercise their mind on that.

From the economists' studies, the TUC reports and the Government's own pay structure, it is difficult to see how a rigid national minimum wage can lift all the low paid out of poverty without creating instability in the poorer regions where living costs are less—unless the Department of Trade and Industry has some extensive research that proves beyond doubt the Government's claim that a regionally varied national minimum wage is unnecessary. If they have and if they are so confident that regional variation is unnecessary, why did not they give the data to the chairman of the Low Pay Commission for him to consider? Why, instead, did they issue a blanket prohibition?

Why, when I asked the DTI what representations had been made to the Low Pay Commission for the introduction of a regionally varied minimum wage, did I receive a reply stating:

"The Low Pay Commission is an independent body. The representations it receives are a matter for the Commission."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. *163*.]

Why did I receive that reply when the DTI was clearly restricting its inquiries? Is that the mark of a Government committed to consulting before breakfast, before lunch and before dinner? Or is this a Government still driven by dogma, but now fuelled by arrogance?

The Liberal Democrats support moves to put a floor under poverty wages, moves to tackle the growing gap between the rich and the poor and efforts to curb rogue firms paying poverty wages subsidised by the taxpayer, but we believe that the Government are throwing caution and flexibility to the winds by refusing to allow the Low Pay Commission to test regional variations in low pay. In due course, we shall seek to amend the Bill, but in the meantime we reserve our position on Third Reading.

7.8 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am pleased to have the chance to speak in this debate, because the Bill is very important and long overdue. The regional low pay statistics published by the labour force survey in spring 1997 show that in the north-west, excluding Greater Manchester and Merseyside, one in 24 employees earn less than £2.49 an hour; one in 13 earn less than £2.99 per hour; one in six earn less than £3.49; and one in four earn less than £3.99. The figures for my constituency are far worse than that: north-east Lancashire is an extremely low-paid area. Many of my constituents receive appalling levels of poverty pay, and it is time that something was done about it.

That poverty pay is reflected across the economic spectrum in Burnley. House prices are low, the house market is sluggish, and trade in the shops is at a lower level than in areas of greater prosperity.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) accepted the principle of a minimum income, but was not prepared to say what the minimum level of pay should be. I have discussed the issue with representatives of industries in my constituency. They ask why decent employers who pay their work force a good wage must compete with employers who pay poverty wages. Not only must they compete with employers who pay unrealistic and unfair wages, but they subsidise those wages through their taxes, which pay for family credit and housing benefit for those on low pay.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, as long as he is quick.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he believe that young people should be entitled to receive the full, national minimum wage?

Mr. Pike: I shall come to that later, but I want to make a few other points first.

Given the low pay and poverty in my area, the council has an anti-poverty officer, Steve Watson, who has written to me to make a number of points. He says:

"The Minimum Wage needs to be set at a level which offers a reasonable return for labour, helping people out of the poverty and benefit trap".

That is extremely important. The Chancellor, in his green Budget, referred to the need to eliminate the conflict between benefits and tax. Some people who go into work lose out, and that will still occur to some extent, whatever level of minimum wage the commission sets.

It was nonsense for the right hon. Member for Wokingham to slam the commission. It is right to introduce the legislation now, alongside the work of the commission. If we were not carrying out consultation, we would be attacked and criticised.

There is no justification for or advantage in regional or age variations. Clause 3 provides that those aged under 26 may be excluded. If that provision is implemented, there must be adequate job protection to ensure that young people who are about to reach that age are not suddenly thrown out of work. I have grave doubts about the need for an age differential, and in any case I think that 26 is too high. We shall see what the commission recommends in due course, and it is sensible to include that option in the Bill.

On regional variations, we should try to eliminate the differences between the more prosperous and the poorer areas. I accept that we shall not eliminate those differences overnight, particularly in London, but London weighting need not be affected by the national minimum wage. Employers in London will be able to pay the national minimum wage and London weighting so as to attract staff. People do not have to start on the minimum level: we are fixing not a normal wage, but a wage that should be used as a base.

When wages councils were abolished, pay levels in Blackpool, which had not previously been at the bottom, immediately dropped to the lowest in Lancashire. Many people in the hotel and catering trade had been protected by wages councils, and their pay dropped as soon as the councils were abolished.

[Mr. Pike]

Burnley borough council, supported by the North West and North Wales Anti-Poverty Forum, of which it is a member, believes that there should be an annual uprating. One of the problems in the United States is that its minimum wage is not annually uprated. It has been uprated in the past 12 months, but it was a long time before that was done. Our national minimum wage must keep up with the rate of inflation, and should not be allowed to fall behind.

We should provide adequate powers and sanctions to ensure that this measure is enforced. Too often in the past, wages council decisions were not enforced. I introduced a ten-minute Bill, which, like most such Bills, fell by the wayside. It proposed local publicity, so that everyone would know which employers were not paying the wages council level. We must ensure that employers cannot avoid paying the national minimum wage.

My union, the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, is a long-time supporter of a national minimum wage. I was a shop steward before I became a Member of Parliament. My pay was based on a number of factors, because I worked a continental shift system. I changed shift every three days, and my basic pay was very different from my take-home pay.

We must ensure that the national minimum wage is uprated, enforced and fair. This is an important step towards a fairer and better society, and I support the Bill 100 per cent. I know that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall not delay the House any longer.

7.18 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The earlier exchange between the President of the Board of Trade and the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) was very revealing. They discussed the extent to which the national minimum wage will lead to job losses. The right hon. Lady correctly said that it depended on what criteria were used for the calculations. The hon. Gentleman, who has studied this subject carefully for many years, rightly said that the most important criterion was differentials. If we assume the restoration of half differentials with a minimum wage of £3.50 an hour, we get the figure of 800,000 job losses. If we assume much lower effects on differentials, we get a lower figure. Lord Healey was right on this subject, when he said in 1994:

"Don't kid yourselves. The minimum wage is something on which the unions will build differentials. Therefore the minimum wage becomes the floor on which you erect a new tower."

In order to claim that there will be no significant impact on jobs, the Government must also claim that there will be no significant impact on differentials. If they can say that they do not believe that there will be an impact on differentials, they can come up with a low figure. I do not consider that claim plausible—but not only is it wildly implausible; it sits very oddly with what I hear from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in my role as Opposition employment spokesman. I hear members of the ministerial team say all the time that they want to encourage people to obtain more qualifications, to go out and be trained. What argument do they use? They say that those people will receive better pay as a reward for staying at college and securing that City and Guilds or national vocational qualification.

Judy Mallaber: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I will give way once.

Judy Mallaber: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that differentials will be increased because they will be restored across industries? Is he suggesting that a skilled engineer will retain the differential between him and a poorly paid hotel worker in the tourism industry, or does he accept that anything to do with differentials is more likely to take place within an industry? We are talking about whole industries in which there is low pay.

Mr. Willetts: I accept that the main effect is within individual industries. Let us take the example that the hon. Lady has given—the catering industry. Let us suppose that an untrained person is working as a kitchen assistant earning £3 an hour, which perhaps goes up to £4 an hour. The person working alongside him, who has a City and Guilds qualification in catering, currently earns £4 an hour. Will that person accept that there was no point in his obtaining a City and Guilds qualification, and that he might as well be untrained? If the Government want to encourage people to go out and obtain City and Guilds or national vocational qualifications, they must accept that the person who is currently working for £4 an hour will feel a bit of an idiot if he is working for exactly the same pay as the untrained person alongside him.

Mr. Pond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I am sorry; as the 10-minute rule is in operation, I should like to proceed with my speech.

If the person who is earning £4 an hour and has a qualification is to feel that obtaining that qualification was not a complete waste of time, he or she will expect some increase in pay to compensate.

We have all just received a letter from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment urging people to go to university and to college. What is the underlying message of that letter? It praises differentials; it argues that people should stay and obtain qualifications, because they will be able to increase their lifetime earnings. What we hear from the President of the Board of Trade and her team at the Department of Trade and Industry is completely inconsistent with the message that we receive from the ministerial team at the Department for Education and Employment. I sometimes wonder whether they communicate with each other.

We also hear a good deal from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the importance of targeting. When they are put under pressure about their plans for cutting benefits, we are told that we must target the welfare state on people in poverty. I wonder whether the DTI team has any understanding of the concept of targeting. The one thing that we know about the minimum wage is that it is extremely ill targeted.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that the most affluent third of households will receive a higher income as a result of the minimum wage than the poorest third. We know that of the 10 per cent. of lowest earners

95 per cent. are not in the 10 per cent. of poorest households. We know—we are told often enough by the new Government—that there are a variety of ways of living: there are households in which some people may be on low incomes and others on higher incomes. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was quite right to say that family credit is very well targeted to deal with poverty wages. If wages cause a household to be in poverty, family credit will kick in.

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I am afraid that I have only a few minutes left.

Family credit is aimed at dealing with poverty wages—wages that hold a whole family down in poverty. However, if someone is earning a low wage but is in a household with a high income, the minimum wage will be ill targeted and family credit unnecessary. The figures are dramatic. Let us say that, in a one-earner household with a young family, one person is in work and earning £3 an hour for a 40-hour week. That household will be entitled to another £55 a week in family credit. We do not expect people to keep a family on £3 an hour, and family credit deals with that.

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I will, very briefly.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman's entire case has been based on the minimum-income family credit system. What does he think that system does for the self-respect and dignity of a man or woman who, after working hard for a week and doing everything that his or her employer wants, must go cap in hand to the state and ask for a handout?

Mr. Willetts: I will respect that intervention, on one condition. I hope that, when the Government introduce such a scheme for 18 to 24-year-olds as part of their welfare-to-work programme, the hon. Gentleman will intervene on his own Minister and make the same point.

What do we know about family credit, which is systematically rubbished by the Government? The Government say that people get stuck as a result of the payment of low wages by unscrupulous employers, but we know that only 12 per cent. of people receive family credit for more than a year. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham rightly explained, once someone is in work, even if it is low paid, he can then move on and up.

Another thing we hear about family credit is that somehow it is exploited by employers. We hear an ingenious argument in favour of the minimum wage—that it will save money, and will stop employers paying below-market rates and exploiting family credit. That has been researched. The completely independent Institute of Employment Studies carried out research into employers and family credit. I sometimes wonder whether Ministers are aware of that research, which concluded:

"Employers did not have adequate knowledge of family credit or sufficient information about potential recruits to adopt such practices"—

that is, the practices that people are worried about. Nor, said the institute, did employers have the freedom to set wage levels. Only 9 per cent. of the employers surveyed agreed that the availability of family credit affected the wages that they paid. The research concluded that family credit

"has little impact on employers' employment practices in terms of their recruitment practices, the hours employees work, and their wage-setting strategies".

Family credit is simply not exploited by employers in the way that has been claimed.

If, however, we adopt the measures proposed by the Chancellor in his green Budget, employers will know all about the wages that their employees receive. The Chancellor proposes that, instead of family credit being delivered through the benefits system, a wage subsidy should be delivered in the form of a withdrawable tax allowance through the PAYE system. If the Chancellor introduces such a system, everything that the Government have been saying about family credit will apply in spades to that system.

At that point, employers will indeed have the crucial information. They will be doing the PAYE calculations; they will be working out exactly what an employee earns. I wonder whether members of the DTI team have discussed the Chancellor's idea with him. I wonder whether they have put to him all their rhetorical arguments against family credit—for which, as we know, there is no empirical support—given that those arguments apply to the very measure that their own Government recently announced as part of the Budget consultation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

7.28 pm

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North-West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to a debate on the national minimum wage. It is a subject of great importance to the country, and I am convinced that it will bring benefits to many of my constituents.

As this is my somewhat belated maiden speech, I shall begin by thanking the electors of Bristol, North-West for their patience, as well as for electing me on 1 May—not just as a Labour Member, but to represent the Co-operative party in the House. After a lifelong involvement as a Co-operator, I look forward to working with the other 24 Labour Co-op Members throughout this Parliament for co-operation in general, and for a Co-operatives Act in particular.

Bristol, North-West is a fascinating constituency. It is made up of six electoral wards in the city of Bristol and three electoral wards in the neighbouring unitary authority of South Gloucestershire. Although, as many hon. Members will be able to imagine, that dichotomy can on occasion cause tensions, the drive and energy in the constituency overall produce great benefits for the area.

Bristol is a wonderful city, and I have been amply rewarded for living and working there for the past 25 years. Its overall beauties and pleasures were well lauded on a previous occasion by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), but, for the record, in contrast with a description by my immediate predecessor in this place, I should like to say that Bristol, North-West contains numerous blades of grass. In fact, it has some fine open spaces and its share of historic buildings, such as Kings Weston house and Blaise Hamlet. Shirehampton, the part of the constituency where I live, was mentioned in the Domesday book.

[Dr. Doug Naysmith]

It is also true that Bristol, North-West provides a large part of the economic engine that drives industry and commerce in the Greater Bristol area. We depend heavily on aerospace and defence industries and on related forms of manufacturing. Therefore, I look forward to the outcome of the current defence review, particularly what it says about defence diversification.

Bristol, North-West has a highly skilled work force, a tradition of invention and technical development and a variety of enterprises along Severnside, which have contributed greatly to Bristol's prosperity over the years. Also with its headquarters in Bristol, North-West is the Bristol Port Company, an enterprise with which I have had some involvement. It is highly successful and underpins much of the industry in the area. It still has the newest and largest lock in the United Kingdom, enabling it to take Cape-size ships. Although the lock is, "unfortunately", located in the constituency of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), no one in Bristol ever forgets that it was built entirely by Bristol ratepayers without a penny of Government assistance.

Also to be found in Bristol, North-West is the university of the West of England, one of the finest of the new universities, and recognised for its teaching quality by independent assessors. It appears that that quality has been recognised by potential students, too—the number of applications is up this year compared with last, a somewhat unusual circumstance.

We also have Abbeywood, the Government's defence procurement headquarters and probably our largest employer, and Southmead, a large and distinguished district hospital with associated teaching status. It is well known for high standards of care and for innovation and research, and it was one of the first hospitals in the UK to pioneer work with neonates, which took place in the much loved, so-called SCBU, the special care baby unit, which is now known as the neonatal intensive care unit. We also have large Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace plants at Filton, just outside Bristol

As hon. Members will have realised, Bristol, North-West is a varied and exciting place, and an equally varied cast of characters has represented it at Westminster since 1945. The constituency has something of a reputation as a weather-vane seat—it is said that it changes in line with public opinion and generally votes for the party that forms the Government. It did that, although only just, in 1992, when, after many recounts, we lost by 45 votes for it to become the most marginal seat in England.

My immediate predecessor was Michael Stern and, although our relations were conducted in a civilised and polite manner, we disagreed, sometimes in public, quite a lot. Much of that was due to his tendency to blame all the ills of his constituents on Bristol city council, a body on which I was an active member, whereas I was much more inclined to blame the previous Government. Perhaps that is understandable. However, we agreed on some of the larger matters, including the battle against a commercial airport at Filton, a heavily populated area, and the improbability of a Severn barrage ever being built.

Michael Stern was very much a House of Commons man and is remembered for his skills in Committee. Although he did not reach great heights in government, he did serve as a parliamentary private secretary to two Ministers and was a vice-chairman of the Conservative party. He was for some time, I am told, captain of the House of Commons chess team, and was in charge of the team that lost 13-3 to Westminster school. However, he fought hard for many of his constituents on an individual level and, since 1 May, I have come across many people who have told me of his tenacity in confronting various bureaucracies. He will be a hard act to follow. He has said that he does not intend to return to politics, and I wish him well in his future interests and activities.

Perhaps Ron Thomas, the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West from 1974 to 1979, will be an even harder act to follow for a Labour Member. Ron is a man of high principles, who is remembered here with respect. I am sure that the minimum wage cause is dear to his heart and something for which he would have fought hard.

I support the introduction of a national minimum wage because it is essential to create a "floor" to the labour market to tackle the exploitation of people with least bargaining power. The Trades Union Congress has produced figures that show that one in five employees earn less than £4 an hour, that nearly 1 million employees earn less than £2.50 an hour, that one in five of the population live in households with less than half the average income, that inequality in this country has grown faster over the past decade than in any other developed country, with the possible exception of New Zealand, and that since 1977 the number of people living well below average income has increased sevenfold.

Such figures should be unacceptable in a civilised, developed nation such as ours, and I fully support the Government's intention to begin to put things right. It is, however, essential to realise that the minimum wage is not just about justice—it also makes economic sense. We cannot compete on low cost alone. We must also compete on quality. Much evidence shows that low wages correlate with lack of training and failure to invest.

Despite the relative prosperity in some parts of my constituency—relative to previous times over the past 18 years and to other parts of the south-west—the national minimum wage is of direct application to many of my constituents in Bristol, North-West. There are estates where unemployment is unacceptably high. If welfare to work is to be successful, it is crucial that wages are high enough to attract people. Together with reform of the tax and benefit systems and our new deal, the national minimum wage should help the Government's strategy to promote work incentives and to provide people with the skills and opportunities to move into work.

The introduction of a national minimum wage provides an opportunity to reduce the unacceptable gap that remains between women's and men's pay. Far more women than men are low paid and that has many adverse affects for women and the economy. It makes it harder for women to be economically independent and to earn enough to escape from dependence on the social security system, and it reduces women's retirement incomes. For those reasons and because of the simple need to have equality between the sexes in the labour market, it is essential that the national minimum wage is calculated in relation to the distribution of male earnings, which can then be applied to female earnings.

I am glad, therefore, that the President of the Board of Trade has said that there will be a single rate, which will apply to all regions and sectors and all sizes of firms. When enacted, the Bill will have far-reaching effects, so I am both excited and pleased to be able to support it.

7.37 pm

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol, North–West (Dr. Naysmith) on his maiden speech. It was thoughtful and well delivered. He described the qualities of his constituency to such an extent that I think we all understand why he is proud to represent it. He also paid humorous and generous tribute to his predecessors and I am sure that we will hear more of him; in fact, I cannot understand why we have not heard from him already.

The hon. Member supported the Bill's principle, which I also welcome. That principle was well established in this country for many years, until the previous Government decided to discontinue all the wages councils except the agricultural wages council. It is the principle that, in a civilised society, there is surely a minimum wage below which anyone who works for a living does not deserve to fall. I would go so far as to say that it encapsulates a moral imperative: people should be paid a wage that is capable of supporting them in their daily existence, after they have given their work to earn that wage.

In examining the background to the Bill, I looked at a document in the Library showing rates of pay by constituency. I was surprised to find a column for people who are paid less than £2.50 an hour. To that extent, it was an educational exercise. I was even more surprised to see how many people were in that column. It is a tragedy that in a society which is moving into the new millennium far too many people receive a wage that cannot support them or their families.

Obviously, costs are involved in the introduction of a minimum wage, but I suspect that no social advance was ever achieved in this country or anywhere else without cost. Perhaps it will be a cost to employers in this case. That was certainly the case with equal pay for women, and I suspect that Conservative Members' arguments against this Bill were used in the 19th century when Wilberforce and others tried to abolish slavery. The amounts being paid to some people are nothing short of slavery wages.

Many employers pay low wages because they know that the state will pick up the tab and will effectively pay to run their enterprises and subsidise their profits. Many arguments against the legislation fail because they look at only one side of the equation—the side that deals with the cost to employers. They do not consider the income that is generated by employees; the extra cash that will be put into the economy by people who benefit from a minimum wage.

Mr. Fallon: Will the hon. Gentleman be happy with a British rate or would he like the Scottish Assembly to have power to vary a rate with which he is unhappy?

Mr. Morgan: I am sure that an independent Scotland will be much more prosperous and will be able to afford a fairly high minimum wage. I look forward to that day.

Mr. Fallon: Will there be much difference?

Mr. Morgan: I am talking about an independent Scotland, which I am sure we shall see in the near future. I must press on.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend asks an extremely good question. Does the Scottish National party think that the Scottish Parliament will and should have the power to vary the rate? Would he wish to set a Scottish rate whatever is done in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Morgan: My answer was quite clear. I was talking about the possibility of a minimum wage in an independent Scotland because it is clear that it is only in an independent Scotland—and not under Labour's devolution proposals—that the Scottish Parliament will control the Scottish economy. If the right hon. Gentleman is asking whether I am in favour of the Scottish Parliament taking control of the Scottish economy and all that goes with it, the answer is a clear yes. Perhaps I can now return to my original point about the benefits to the economy of a minimum wage.

By definition, a minimum wage is paid to those who are on the lowest incomes, and those are the people who spend the largest percentage of their incomes buying necessities. That creates a demand for goods; people who complain about the cost of a minimum wage fail to realise that extra money will be put into the marketplace to buy goods.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morgan: No. My time is limited.

That extra spending applies particularly to rural areas such as the one that I represent. There is simply not enough money circulating in the economy, and one of the knock-on effects of the Bill will be to increase that, especially in the rural economy. It is not just that people in rural areas have lower wages than people in other areas: they also have disproportionately higher living costs.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) spoke about the high cost of living in urban areas and especially in London. He should buy a bag of groceries in London and then come to Stranraer to try to buy the same groceries at the London price. He will find that difficult. There is no future for the United Kingdom as a low-wage economy or one in which there is a large disparity between the lowest and the highest wage. Low-wage jobs are usually those that are most easily substituted by the introduction of new technology. Low wages do not engender industrial competitiveness. They may be a season ticket to long-term industrial decline and increased unemployment.

I am concerned about some details in the legislation. The first relates to the protection of employees and the enforcement of the minimum wage. We must ensure that the Bill's provisions are enforced and that the Government allocate sufficient resources to do that. One of the problems that we have inherited from the previous Government is that although there are regulations aplenty, there are not enough employees to enforce them. It would be a tragedy to pass legislation that gives so much hope to people and not put in place inspectors or mechanisms to enforce it.

Secondly, I am concerned about young people. If the level set for them is lower than the national minimum wage, so that there is a separate minimum wage for the young, older people in employment will be replaced by young people to whom employers can pay a lower rate. There should be a rate for the job, regardless of age. The needs of 20 to 26-year-olds are no different from the

[Mr. Morgan]

needs of those who are over 26. I hope that the Government will not introduce a separate rate for those under 26.

I again welcome the Bill's principles. It is a step forward in introducing better financial conditions for many of our workers. Just as the 19th century factory Acts were a step forward in introducing better physical conditions for workers, the Bill is a step forward in introducing better financial conditions. It will be opposed by precisely the same sort of people who opposed the 19th century factory Acts, and for precisely the same reasons.

7.46 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on introducing the Bill. It is a long-overdue measure which will begin to bring to an end the poverty pay that has scarred the lives of so many. I pay tribute to the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). As the House knows, he has been committed to getting the Bill before the House and making a minimum wage a reality.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) kindly said, before I came to the House in May, I spent 17 years working for the Low Pay Unit, an organisation with which I am still proud to be associated. During that time, I saw the effects of the previous Government's policies at the sharp end. The number of those in poverty increased threefold during the Conservatives' term of office, and that led to low wages being the largest single cause of poverty. Britain has a larger proportion of its adult work force earning below the Council of Europe's decency threshold than any other European Union state. In my constituency, a third of the work force are in that category.

Each Christmas, the Low Pay Unit makes a "Scrooge of the Year" award. When I was at the unit, I was always a little anxious that the Conservative Government might take over the award. As my hon. Friends will understand, the unreformed Ebenezer Scrooge was to be pitied and reviled, but we were always fearful that the Conservative Government might decide to include him in the new year honours list for services to British industry in helping to turn Britain into the sweatshop of Europe. As we have heard, previous nominees for the award included the employer of a woman who worked in a residential nursing home. In a letter to her, that employer stated:

"I would like you to work 5pm to 9am Monday to Sunday inclusive."

That is 112 hours of night work. The letter goes on:

"Salary will be paid in arrears at a rate of £150 a week",

which is about £1.34 an hour.

Other nominees for the award included a clothing workshop in which staff are paid 59p an hour, and another in which staff are paid 1p for each petticoat and 5p for each dress sewn. Those rates were being paid not in the time of Dickens or in what we once called the third world but in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom—which, until May, was Tory Britain. I have this year's nominations.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pond: No, I have very little time. I apologise. I have this year's nominations, although I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will have his own.

The nominations include a machinist earning 8p for each pair of trousers sewed; a worker in a residential care home earning £1.66 an hour; and a skilled needlewoman earning £1.25 a day for making puppets at home. As the House will appreciate, even this year, the judges are faced with a difficult decision. Such examples have convinced me of the Bill's importance and of the fact that, in this day and age, no one should be required to work for such pitiful pay and conditions.

Britain is the only country in the industrialised world without some form of legally enforceable pay protection. Since the previous Government abolished wages councils in 1993, no UK citizen, with the exception of those working in agriculture, has been entitled to any basic pay level. That is in contravention of the universal declaration of human rights, which states:

"Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring . . . an existence worthy of human dignity".

Too many of our citizens are denied that basic human right and dignity. It is a matter of basic social justice.

Mr. Brady: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pond: I am sorry, but I will not give way. Time is limited for all hon. Members, and especially for those on the Back Benches.

A minimum wage is an essential part of the Government's welfare to work strategy, which is designed to ensure that work pays. It is also a matter of equity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) said, a minimum wage will be of greatest importance to women. It is no coincidence that Britain is the only country without a minimum wage and the country in Europe with the widest pay gap between men and women. A minimum wage will do more to close that gap than equal pay legislation—important as that is—could ever achieve.

As we have also heard in the debate, in addition to justice and equity arguments, there is a sound economic and business case for a minimum wage. The Secretary of State reminded us of Churchill's words in establishing the minimum wage in 1909. He described the situation in which people earned less than a living wage as a "serious national evil". The previous Government and Conservative Members consider that not as an evil but as an instrument of economic strategy.

Many small firms—70 per cent. of them—are in favour of a national minimum wage precisely because of concerns such as those that Churchill expressed—that, without some form of minimum wage, good employers are undercut by the bad, and bad employers are undercut by the worst. Those firms believe that a national minimum wage will establish a fair playing field and ensure that cowboy employers are not able to undercut responsible firms in wages. A minimum wage will also ensure that responsible firms are able to invest in training and in

better production techniques that will help the United Kingdom to compete more effectively in the modern world.

We know also that a minimum wage will help to stimulate employment, economic growth and consumer confidence by increasing the spending power of several million of the poorest workers, allowing them to buy the goods and services that other people produce. Moreover, as several hon. Members have already asked, why should taxpayers be contributing between £3 billion and £4 billion annually to subsidise the low-wage and inefficient cowboy firms that are dragging down responsible employers? The net revenue effects of a minimum wage—in its benefits and tax implications, and even taking into account public sector cost—will certainly bring a smile to the face of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We have heard much from Conservative Members in the debate, and we will hear much more, about the supposed employment effects of a minimum wage. As the Secretary of State reminded the House, however, at each general election estimates of the impact of a minimum wage become ever more extravagant. The supposed employment effect was initially set at 60,000 lost jobs, but the number quickly rose to 600,000 under Norman Tebbit, who was then Secretary of State for Employment. The estimate then rose from 750,000 to 1 million and, before the 1992 general election, to 2 million. Immediately afterwards, it was revised downwards to 1 million.

Those estimates were based on assumptions that the Treasury has said were wholly arbitrary and without any empirical basis. All the evidence that we have available from this country, from the European Union and from the United States suggests that a minimum wage, if sensibly set, could enhance employment growth.

The cheap labour policies of the previous Government were justified on the basis that it was thought that the policies would create employment. The costs were very high, leaving us in a situation in which, last year, a South Korean manufacturer reported that he was paying two thirds as much to his staff employed in south Wales as he was to those doing the same job in South Korea. As we have also heard, the pay gap is wider now than it was in 1886, when figures were first collected. However, evidence on job creation in the years in which the previous Government's policies were pursued show that, proportionately, Germany created four times as many jobs as we did, Italy six times as many, and France twice as many.

What has happened since the 1992 general election, and the abolition of wages councils shortly afterwards? I am grateful to Professor Patrick Minford, former adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the previous Government, who said:

"there has been no job creation, measured in extra hours worked, since 1992".

The Bill is a good Bill. It is comprehensive and, therefore, its enforcement is likely to be effective. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for dealing with concerns about clauses 3 and 4 and suggestions that they somehow mean that there will be an exemption or different treatment for those under 26. It is clear from her clarification that the Bill is an enabling measure to allow her to consider recommendations from the Low Pay Commission.

7.56 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): There is complete agreement among Conservative Members that achievement of a high-wage and high-productivity economy is a desirable objective. The way of achieving that objective is through labour market flexibility and sustainable economic growth. The Bill will deliver neither of those. It is an ill-conceived piece of legislation and a hangover from Labour's past. It is an IOU—

Mr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hammond: So soon!

Mr. Turner: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the previous Government's proposals were such a wonderful way of promoting a high-wage and high-productivity economy, why did they not create one?

Mr. Hammond: We have prepared the ground—as economic growth continues—to generate just that: a high-wage and high-productivity economy.

The Bill is an IOU to the Government's paymasters in the trade unions—an IOU which, I suspect, many senior Ministers would love to tear up but dare not.

It is difficult to imagine a debate that will necessarily be as ill-informed as this one. It is ill-informed because we lack the vital piece of relevant information properly to debate the subject: the level of the proposed national minimum wage. Nothing could show us more clearly that the Government do not want to debate the issue properly than the fact that they are depriving us of that information.

Will it be a minimum wage with teeth—one that really bites? If so, the consequences could be significant, and the economic damage could be massive. Will it be a political gesture, and set at a level that will cover few workers and have few consequences for the economy? Will it be set at a level that is irrelevant in the south-east, or at a level that will cost thousands of job and hundreds of businesses in the north and in Wales?

I can see no reason why the Bill could not have been postponed until the Low Pay Commission had reported, so that we were able to debate the matter in a common sense manner, knowing the proposed initial level of the national minimum wage. Instead, we are forced to address ourselves to abstract theory.

The key to sustainable higher pay is increased productivity. That is the only way we can develop the high-wage, high-skill economy to which we all aspire. Workers who can upgrade their skills, and employers who can improve the productivity of their labour will survive the impact of the minimum wage. However, in the vast majority of cases, those employers and employees are already moving down that route as a result of the pressures of a tightening labour market in a growing economy.

Those who will be hurt by the national minimum wage include those who are unable to improve their productivity to cover the increased costs of their labour, employees who lack the ability or the inclination to reskill and employers who lack access to the necessary capital or technology.

[Mr. Hammond]

The small business sector will be hit hardest. In many small businesses, the working proprietor already works very long hours for a low rate of return. The cost of a minimum wage will fall wholly on him. Increasing the effective hourly rate for his employees will, necessarily, reduce his own effective hourly rate. Very small businesses often do not have the ability to change the ratios of capital and labour within their business.

I predict that, at the margins, the result of minimum wage legislation, set at any effective level, will be to drive some small businesses into the black economy.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): The hon. Gentleman may recall that many of these arguments were used against the Equal Pay Act 1970. Will he tell the House whether he now supports the repeal of that Act?

Mr. Hammond: Of course I do not support the repeal of that Act.

As I have said, I believe that the legislation may force some small businesses into the black economy—I am thinking of businesses with only one or two employees such as the examples given earlier—where employers and employees will conspire together to protect their jobs and their businesses.

Small businesses were promised proper representation on the Low Pay Commission, but that did not happen. Once again, we see the prospect of small businesses being the principal victims of the deliberations of so-called representative bodies, which primarily represent large business, organised labour and academic interests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said that the evidence suggests that the minimum wage will have little impact on poverty. The households in the greatest poverty are generally without income from employment. The phenomenon of the working poor, while important, is a minor component of the overall poverty problem.

As the President of the Board of Trade indicated, the Government intend to make substantial savings from reductions in means-tested in-work benefits after the introduction of the minimum wage. That transfer of costs from the social security budget to employers represents yet another tax on business. One can argue the merits of the case, but the economic impact will be to impose yet another tax on business.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) drew attention to the impact on our public services, the enhancement of which has been set by the Government as one of their great priorities. How will a minimum wage help primary schools in my constituency to employ additional classroom assistants or special needs assistants? How will it help social services departments to provide better care for the elderly or the infirm? How will it help hospitals to shorten their waiting lists? Can the Government give us an assurance that, in every case, budgets will be increased to compensate for the impact of the minimum wage, not just for employees paid at the minimum level but for the very many in the public sector who are paid just above any likely level of the minimum wage, as differentials are restored?

Mr. Woolas: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in local government there is already a minimum rate of pay, which is set at about £4 an hour, and that those arguments have not applied there?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is speculating about what the minimum wage level will be. Perhaps he knows something that we do not. Perhaps the Minister would care to come to my constituency and explain to the dedicated mothers who work as classroom assistants in the primary schools—

Mr. Woolas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hammond: I will not give way.

Will the Minister explain to those mothers why their jobs should be put at risk? The legislation does not concede that there is a gradient between purely voluntary work and work motivated entirely by earning power. Many thousands of people in this country work for mixed motives, including many pensioners. They will no longer be able to take pin money jobs doing work they enjoy or which serves their communities. That shows me—if I needed to be shown—that the nanny state is alive and well under this Government.

This is an ill-conceived measure which will cause most damage to those it seeks to protect. It will cost the jobs of the most marginal employees and will destroy the most vulnerable businesses. If it is set at a level that bites, the minimum wage will push some employees into the black economy where they will not enjoy the benefit of a minimum wage and will lose the protection of much other employment legislation. It will damage the front-line capability of our public services. It would be better if it were not done, but the Labour party's debts to its paymasters have to be paid.

If the Government are determined to have the Bill, we must ensure, by debate and argument, that the minimum wage is set at a level where it applies only to those workers who are paid at a very low level. We must ensure that it is set by reference to total pay and not to some hourly rate of nominal pay, and we must ensure that those earnings are averaged over a period which reflects industry or employer custom and practice, and are not just imposed by the Government.

One of Britain's most striking successes of the past two decades has been the restoration of flexibility in its labour market. That achievement has insulated us from the worst experiences of our European neighbours over the past few years.

8.6 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): I join many other hon. Members in congratulating the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) on the production of the Bill. I wish to thank him for the enormous amount of work that he has put into it.

The Bill will be particularly welcome in my constituency. I should tell the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) that this is

an IOU; it is an IOU to the people of this country, particularly low-paid workers, who have been desperate to see this legislation on the statute book. In three of the four wards in my constituency, there is an unemployment rate of well over 20 per cent. The majority of those who are employed work in the hotel, catering, retail and garment industries. Those are the very sectors of the economy in which low pay is concentrated. The excellent House of Commons Library document, which many hon. Members have, shows that 41 per cent. of those employed in the distribution, hotel or restaurant industries earn less than £4 an hour.

In my constituency—I am sure that the same is true in many others—the majority of those affected by low pay are part-time working women and young people. Perhaps unusually, in my constituency many of them come from the Asian community. In the sweatshops in my constituency, young Asian girls earn just over £1 an hour. If they are paid £1.50 an hour, that is considered to be a lot of money. That is at a time when the average gross wage in the United Kingdom is £8.75 an hour.

In many ways, it must be amazing to many hon. Members that we are even having this debate as we come to the end of this millennium and look forward to the next. Here we are debating decency in society and whether we should set a safety net below which people should not be allowed to fall.

Some of the comments that I have heard this evening from Opposition Members have been staggering. I did not know until now that the Tory party was officially in favour of subsidising poverty pay and I am grateful that that position has been made clear tonight. I thought that Conservative Members were more surreptitious about it, but tonight they have made it clear that that is their position.

I also found it interesting that a number of Opposition Members were proud of the fact that the wages councils were abolished. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) crowed at their abolition and claimed that the abolition had created a great deal more employment. As has been said by other hon. Members, the one wages council that was not abolished was the Agricultural Wages Board. I should be interested to hear whether Opposition Members, most of whom since 1 May represent rural, rather than urban, constituencies—I say that with no disrespect—support the Agricultural Wages Board's minimum wage, which it has now laid down at £4.12 per week—*[Laughter.]* I mean an hour. I think that that Freudian slip makes my point. I should like to know whether Conservative Members support the board's decision of £4.12 an hour or whether they believe that the farm workers living in their constituencies are overpaid. I should be interested in their answers.

In the discussions on the subject that I have had with business—I was with the Confederation of British Industry in Birmingham only last week—it has expressed its concern, not at the Bill's principle, but at the level at which the minimum wage will be set. Of course, that level must take into account all the factors and it must be sensible and realistic. When I consider the chairmanship of the Low Pay Commission and the other members who have been appointed to it—they are knowledgeable and eminent—I have no doubt that all the factors will be taken into account. I am sure that the commission's recommendation will be one with which industry can live comfortably. It will also be one which the low-paid people of this country will greatly welcome.

Mrs. Gorman: How will the hon. Gentleman make his views known to those people who he alleges are earning only £1.50 an hour if, as he hopes, the Government introduce a wage of £4.50 an hour and those people lose their jobs? How will that help those people to climb up the skills ladder that will enable them to earn better wages?

Mr. Godsiff: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but all I can tell her is that if I walked into some of those sweatshops and told the employees that they were to be paid £4.50 and hour, my majority would immediately go up from 19,000 to 29,000. I cannot answer the hon. Lady's question because we shall have to wait and see. I have heard the argument that if we set the minimum wage level too high we will produce a certain number of job losses and I have also heard the counter argument that if we set it at another level it will have no effect on job losses. I cannot give the hon. Lady the answer because I cannot look into a crystal ball, but I can look at the weekly pay packet of someone walking home with £70 or £80 to live on. I know that the hon. Lady would be mindful of the problems involved in trying to do that.

When the Low Pay Commission considers the subject, it must be very conscious of young people. It would be wrong to adopt the principle that people under the age of, for example, 25 should be treated differently from those over the age of 25 when they are doing exactly the same job. That principle cannot be right, but it can be right if the person is learning the job or is being trained. But once the other person has attained the skills and is doing the same job as the person standing next to him, it cannot be right, purely on the basis of age, to pay those two people different rates of pay. That would be a perverse sort of agism—agism turned upside down—and I hope that that will not happen.

I believe that the legislation will have a lasting, historical impact on the people and economy of this country. I believe that the legislation will be wholly to the good and that the millions of low-paid people of this country who looked to the Labour party to introduce such legislation will be pleased that the party has kept its promises and, as the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) said, paid its IOU.

8.15 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): The Bill shows the Government's arrogance, naivety and cack-handedness. It shows the Government's arrogance in setting up a Low Pay Commission and giving its members high salaries before having parliamentary approval to do so. I know that the new terracotta soldiers—

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): May I correct the right hon. Gentleman: for the record, Low Pay Commission members are not being paid salaries. Unlike the previous Government, who had quangos full of Tory party members, the commission's members are prepared to work for nothing.

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to hear that comment from the Minister of State, but the commission has been

[Mr. Maclean]

set up without parliamentary approval and the taxpayer is incurring costs. Those hon. Members who have been here since before 1 May used to pay high regard to the precedent that a Government did not act until they had the statutory approval to do so. That is the first example of the Government's arrogance.

Another example of their arrogance is the fact that although the Bill is now before the House, we are not to be told about its guts. We are being asked to agree in principle a pig in a poke. The only people whom it will satisfy will be the Liberal Democrat Members, each of whom will be able to go home—they seem to have gone already—and tell his constituents that he voted for the principle, but not to worry as the rate that will be set will probably be perfect for the constituency. When, inevitably, the level turns out to be either too high or too low, the Liberal Democrats can blame the Government.

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Perhaps we can be allowed to speak for ourselves on that subject and not have words put into our mouths.

Mr. Maclean: I shall remember not to bother to give way to the hon. Gentleman in future if that is the only sort of remark that he can make.

The Bill is one of the most important planks of the Government's legislation, but neither we nor the Labour Members have the slightest idea what the wage level will be. Will it be set at a very low level, as the President of the Board of Trade wants, or at a much higher level, as the Treasury wants or at a level that the Scottish Nationalists want? The one answer that I do want from the Minister of State tonight—if he would care to pay attention for a moment—is whether the Scottish Parliament, when it is set up, will be responsible for setting the minimum wage for Scotland or whether that responsibility will remain with the President of the Board of Trade. Will she be responsible for setting the minimum wage applied to the Scottish nation? We want a clear answer to that question. Either the power to set the minimum wage will remain with the President of the Board of Trade in England, and Scotland will fall into line with the United Kingdom national minimum wage, or the level will be set by the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The national minimum wage is exactly that; it is a national minimum wage for all workers in Scotland, in Wales, in England and in Northern Ireland. There are no Tories left in Scotland who can argue the case for or against the national minimum wage.

Mr. Maclean: I am, however, Member of Parliament for a constituency on the Scottish border. That is why—

Mr. McCartney: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclean: I will not give way again to the Minister.

It is important for my constituents to know whether we shall have a national minimum wage and whether a distortion will be caused by there being a different level in Scotland. I am relieved that the Scottish Parliament will not have the right to set a separate minimum wage which would be a great distortion in my constituency.

The Government are naive in another way. If they think that no distortions will be caused by a minimum wage, they clearly have no experience in the real industrial world. We have already heard that wages and living costs in different parts of the United Kingdom are fundamentally different. Our wages in Cumbria are, of course, lower than they are in the south-east, but so are our housing costs and our travel-to-work costs. Our schools and many other facilities are better and in the lake district, we have a better environment. We have all the competitive advantages.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclean: No; the Minister can make his own speech when he winds up the debate.

Mr. McCartney: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way, just once more?

Mr. Maclean: I will give way then.

Mr. McCartney: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that when he worked in industry, he worked for Securicor? Will he also confirm that Securicor is in favour of a national minimum wage and an agreement with the trade unions in its work force?

Mr. Maclean: The Minister seems to think that he makes an awfully telling point, but I fail to see it. Yes, I used to work for Securicor. If I did not like the wages it paid, I had the choice of working for someone else. I cannot see for the life of me what point the Minister is trying to make. I am fighting for my constituency and not for Securicor or any other employer. My constituency will be severely affected by a national minimum wage.

The national minimum wage will cause distortions which will harm labour in Cumbria, which already has the disadvantage of being one of the more remote parts of the United Kingdom. It will remove one of our most competitive advantages. Our cost of living is lower and, as I have told the House, many of our other costs are lower. Yes, our wages are lower. At the end of the day, however, the quality of living is every bit as good—

Mr. Desmond Turner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman should have said that his constituency is largely covered by the only minimum wage board, the Agricultural Wages Board.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is clearly a matter for debate.

Mr. Maclean: The point made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Turner) is not a matter for the Chair. In addition, if that is the best point with which the Minister can prime his Back Benchers, he is even more feeble than I thought.

Miss Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclean: No, I will not give way because I wish to conclude my remarks.

Many parts of the United Kingdom will be disadvantaged by the minimum wage, whatever it may be. There is no doubt that Cumbria's main competitive advantage will be removed. We shall be forced to pay proportionately higher hourly wages than other parts of the United Kingdom. That will remove our competitive advantage and that is why many of my constituents will suffer as a result of the Bill.

It is no good for the Government to pretend that everyone will be a winner and that there will be no losers. Once the Low Pay Commission reports, all the happy faces on the Labour Benches will suddenly change. Some Labour Members will be desperately unhappy that the wage is far lower than they expected, whereas others will be unhappy because it is higher than they expected and they will feel that their constituents will not get the protection they want.

The one thing that we can be certain about is that the House has been deprived of the opportunity to make a decision tonight on the real contents of the Bill. The House is giving the Government the power to impose a minimum wage when we do not have the faintest idea what that wage will be. That is treating the House with contempt and is typical of this Government's arrogance so far.

8.24 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I represent probably the lowest-paid constituency in the country. It would be fair to say that the people of Falmouth and Camborne are crying out for a national minimum wage. So important is the issue that I want to describe some of the problems that my constituents face.

At present, unemployment stands at 10 per cent. and is falling, but we are losing many of our traditional industries and replacing them with small companies which generally pay lower wages. Across Cornwall, our traditional industries are in decline. The problems of farming, fishing and mining are well known to the House.

The last tin mine in Cornwall—and, indeed, in Europe—is located in my constituency near Camborne. South Crofty provides employment for 200 to 300 people. Many development miners earn good wages and that is just one reason why we are fighting so hard to save the mine and the 900 jobs in the wider economy. Increasingly, our economy relies on tourism. Despite our best efforts, it is predominantly a seasonal industry and it is notorious for low pay. I will return to the implications of that later.

Against the background of a declining economy, the gross domestic product for Cornwall generally is 69 per cent. of the national average. As a county, we could qualify for objective 1 status in Europe and we are fighting for it. In Falmouth, Redruth, Penryn and Camborne, many thousands of my constituents are forced to rely on family credit to live. Survey after survey has found levels of poverty among the highest in the country. My constituency is designated a semi-urban area, yet it does not get urban relief and it does not qualify for rural assistance. We are caught not between a rock and a hard place, but between poverty and the sea.

Hon. Members might assume, given all those factors, that we enjoy lower prices, but that is far from the truth. Our water charges are among the highest in the country. Food costs are high, as our produce leaves the county for a song and is reimported at significantly higher rates.

Extraordinarily, we have some of the highest car ownership rates in the country. Public transport is scarce and, to get a job, people have to own a car. We are a pathfinder area for the new deal. The Employment Service correctly identified the fact that one of the biggest obstacles to the young people of Cornwall obtaining employment was the lack of transport. It is marvellous that a pool of mopeds is being bought to enable young people to get to jobs. People need transport to get to jobs. We are so reliant on the car that the county council has a real problem with second-hand car traders from Birmingham who bring down their wrecks which are then sold at inflated rates in the local economy.

In that context, cheap pay is a nightmare for my constituents. I will inform hon. Members of the levels we are talking about. The rate that sticks in my mind comes from a card I saw in the Penryn jobcentre. Among the advertisements for care workers at £2.20 an hour and kitchen porters at £2 an hour, one said:

"Skilled car mechanic required for village garage. Must have own transport, 40 hours, weekends and nights. £1.80 an hour."

Just this Saturday, a man from Falmouth came to my surgery to ask for assistance. For a number of years, he and others have worked for a prestigious leading hotel in Falmouth, but they have been laid off; I understand that the management have brought in workers from France and Spain to work for £1 an hour.

The Government are absolutely right to bring in a national minimum wage. In my visits to companies throughout Cornwall, I have found that the companies that are doing well are the ones that pay their staff decent rates of pay, are investors in people and see training and quality as the key to the future. I am the daughter of a journalist and a hairdresser. My mother had three hairdressing salons, employing up to 30 staff. She was competitive—as I remember, a shampoo and set cost two and sixpence in old money—but she paid above wages council rates. She welcomed the wages council, as it stopped fly-by-night operators and prevented them from moving into her area and—no pun intended—undercutting her. That is as true today as it was when I was a child.

Hon. Members might think that, with the experience of low pay in my constituency, we have been overwhelmed by companies beating their way into the county; in fact, the opposite is true. We have low pay and high unemployment, and the larger employers are actually relocating up country, out of Cornwall, to higher wage areas. I do not want to hear Conservative Members' nonsense that low pay brings employment, because our experience is the opposite. The Bill is both morally and politically right. If my constituents are to be lifted out of poverty, the sooner it is in force, the better.

8.31 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I am tempted to deal with one or two of the points raised by Labour Members that were rooted in clichés about unemployment, because such points sometimes go unanswered.

The subject of women's pay and the Equal Opportunities Commission was raised by the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas). The Equal Opportunities Commission has itself bewailed the fact that since equal pay was introduced and it began pursuing employers in courts over wages, the number of

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

women in high-skilled occupations—especially in the teaching and nursing professions, where women previously had niche employment opportunities—has been seriously undermined.

Mr. Woolas *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Gorman: I simply put that point to the hon. Gentleman, whether he approves or disapproves of it. The commission has said that equal pay has had an adverse effect on employment opportunities for women.

On the point that the hon. Gentleman made about his local council having a policy of paying £4.50 an hour, I can only say that, well, councils can pay that much. They are paying wages out of the public purse, so to speak—they draw the money that they use to pay people from rates and taxes and not from profitability in the marketplace. It is that profitability which drives up minimum wages, through competition for labour.

Miss Geraldine Smith: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: No, the hon. Lady can have her own time a bit later.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) talked about women who were earning £1.50 an hour and how delighted he was that they were going to get £4 an hour and that he would be able to go down and tell them that that wonderful news was brought to them by the Labour party. According to that doctrine, the employer will have to find another £3 an hour for each person working in his factory—but the hon. Gentleman did not tell us where the employer was to get that money. The employer can get it only out of the profitability of his product.

What paying wages boils down to is the productivity of the individual person and that person's skills. Young people in my constituency aged 18 working as highly skilled bricklayers are not earning £1.50 an hour—they are taking home £800 or £900 a week. That may be the same rate or even a better one than older people receive, but it is dependent on their skills and productivity. That is the essence of the wages that employers can afford to pay.

I commented earlier on the composition of the Low Pay Commission. There are nine people on it, three of whom are academics who are on the state payroll and therefore not necessarily in need of supplementary income, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) pointed out. Three others are trade union leaders—or senior executives—who are on the payroll of their unions, so the issue of whether or not they are being paid for sitting on the commission is not especially significant. Only three members of the commission represent some aspect of the employment world. One comes from the Confederation of British Industry, which represents large companies; one comes from the Scottish Grocers Federation, which is dominated by the large multiples; and the other comes from the Granada Group.

All those are large employers—not that they all pay high wages. Many employers in the security industry, which is dominated by large companies, pay relatively modest wages. The point is that if firms are in competition for business and they cannot pay more, the Bill will not mean that their employees will go home with a larger pay packet; it means that they will go home with no pay packet at all.

Miss Geraldine Smith: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: No, I have only 10 minutes and I am sure that the hon. Lady will make a marvellous contribution when she is called to speak.

I asked two business men in my constituency—real employers who provide real jobs—about the implications of the Bill. One of them is a respectable local builder who does lots of work for the local council, who has been a member of the council and who does splendid work. I asked him about wages in his industry, which is still controlled by the Construction Industry Training Board. I asked what would persuade him to pay higher wages and he told me that, to begin with, it was a matter of what the contractor would pay him. His contractors include the local council, which asks him to submit bids for jobs. He has to be competitive in the wages he can offer, because 90 per cent. of his outgoings are wages. To get work for his employees, he has to be competitive. It is not a question of whether he wants to be benevolent and double his employees' wages overnight—any employer would like to be able to do that—but in the real world employers have to compete for jobs.

That local builder tells me that the industry's training programmes have been largely destroyed by the trade unions, which insisted on apprenticeship schemes paying uneconomic rates to young people. He said that when they were facing deadlines his tradesmen were not going to slow down to train a young person when that young person was being paid almost as much as they were. It is not logical. In the building industry, hardly anybody—not even the big companies or local councils—take on trainees and apprentices because the market is competitive and the trade unions have set minimum rates.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Lady give way? Does she know the rates?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

Mrs. Gorman: The trade unions have set minimum rates for young people.

The great majority of people on low wages are youngsters who are unskilled, women returning to the labour market with out-of-date skills, or people who are adding to a family budget. We keep hearing the cliché about all wages being a living wage or we talk about wages that support a family, but many people are bringing home a wage which contributes to a family budget and that bit of extra money means a lot to many families. The Labour party will not shed any tears if people cannot bring in that extra money, which means the difference between buying a pair of plimsolls for the children or getting them a prized pair of Reeboks, or taking the children to Disneyworld rather than to the local funfair. People go to work for all sorts of reasons, not just the wages—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. The hon. Lady is entitled to be heard.

Mrs. Gorman: Thank you for your support, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Another group on modest wages are people with disabilities of various kinds, including intellectual disabilities, who cannot produce work at a rate or with the skills that will command high wages. It is quite right that the Government should step in to supplement their incomes. We should not throw the entire burden on the employer. The employer will simply say, "I cannot make enough money out of this person's labour to support the wages the Government are inflicting on us."

Several hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), have mentioned the south-west. I have put it to the hon. Lady that the problem there also has to do with relatively low skills. As she says, it is an area which has traditionally relied on tourism, which accounts for many low-skilled jobs. There is no reason to denigrate those sorts of jobs. We are talking about highly competitive seasonal work.

The same applies to agriculture. It is no coincidence that the board presiding over agricultural wages oversees a low-paid industry. Almost without exception, the wages councils presided over industries with relatively low rates of pay; indeed, the rates set by the wages councils became not the minimum but the maximum for those industries. It was only when we abolished the wages councils for, say, the retail trade that wages in it started to rise. So the councils' effect was the opposite of that intended—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Gorman: I will not give way, since the points I am making are all fascinating—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.41 pm

Mr. Douglas Alexander (Paisley, South): I am grateful for this opportunity to make my maiden speech in a debate on the national minimum wage, for it is a subject of the greatest importance to many of my constituents.

It is a convention of the House that a new Member should pay tribute to his predecessor. Even if there were no such convention, I would be determined to pay tribute to Gordon McMaster, the Member of Parliament for Paisley, South from 1990. I did not know Gordon well, although it is a matter of pride to me that on the day in 1990 when Margaret Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister I was campaigning for his election on the streets of Paisley. Christmas came early for the voters of Paisley that year, but it was to be another seven years before they had a Government who reflected their will and the will of the people of Scotland. During those years, Gordon came to be viewed throughout the constituency with real pride and affection for his concern and commitment to his constituents.

Like his father before him, Gordon was a gardener by trade. Before entering the House, he played a significant role in establishing a highly successful initiative, Growing Concern, which combined his love of gardening with providing opportunities for disabled people to learn about horticulture. When he entered the House, Gordon's long-standing commitment to disability issues was reflected in his parliamentary life. He served both as Front-Bench spokesman on disabled people's rights and as secretary to the all-party disablement group. He was a credit to his parents, Willy and Alison, to his constituency and to the House.

In his work in Parliament and the constituency, Gordon upheld the tradition of service of my first Member of Parliament, Norman Buchan—Gordon's predecessor. During my childhood, Norman was a frequent visitor to my home. His inspirational conversation and his commitment to socialism in part explain my presence in the House today.

My constituency, which both men represented in their day, is in the county of Renfrewshire. Having grown up and lived there for almost 20 years, I was especially honoured to be chosen by the Labour party to contest the seat and to be given so much support by so many.

The constituency that I have the privilege to represent is proud of its industrial heritage and the hard work of its people: the mills of Paisley, the carpet factory at Elderslie, the town of Johnstone, where the first machine tool foundry in the world was established. The people of my constituency embody many of the best qualities of the west of Scotland—a willingness to work hard, a sustaining sense of humour and an instinctive sense of community at all times.

I am proud of those traditions from the past, but I know that it is the future that matters. In this new economy, all that my constituents ask is to be given the chance to contribute their talents and skills to the work of the nation. Certainly, there are already successes. Paisley university faces the new century as a proud and ambitious institution. Renfrewshire continues its success in manufacturing; indeed, the county produces a third of all Scotland's manufactured exports. This is the pattern for the 21st century, when we shall have to produce the highest quality goods and services and sell them in an ever more competitive global market.

While traditional industries in the constituency have largely gone, many people in the work force are not equipped with the skills to contribute to, and benefit from, these new successes. To attempt to compete from a position of low skills and low wages offers not a route forward but a route back—back to unemployment, poverty and social division. I must report that more than 2,300 people in the constituency are officially unemployed, almost 600 of them under the age of 25. When they look for work at the local jobcentre, they see positions with hourly wages as low as £2.50 an hour for a cleaner, or £2.80 an hour for a kitchen assistant.

That is why the Bill matters urgently to the people of Paisley, South. For my constituents, it is a matter not of wanting a national minimum wage but of needing one. For 18 years, we had a Government who advanced the idea that the price of greater prosperity was greater inequality and who tried to frighten people out of their commitment to fairness. I am therefore impelled to speak my mind, not solely by anger but by a sense of urgency, to end injustice and to give opportunity to people who have had to wait too long for a Government who are on their side.

The new Government's proposals offer hope to the people of my constituency. Our victory on 1 May offers an historic opportunity to end the centuries old injustice of poverty pay. I was reminded of just how old the struggle to win decency in the workplace is when, on the night of my election, I entered Paisley town hall to await the result. As I entered the building, I passed the statue of Robert Tannahill, the weaver poet of Paisley. Almost two centuries ago, he was forced to leave the town

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

in search of a living wage. My constituents know all too well that the evil of poverty pay is still with us as we approach the 21st century.

When people look back at our time, let the national minimum wage be the monument by which they remember our commitment to dignity and decency in the workplace. The Government's Low Pay Commission will bring together businesses, large and small, with employees' representatives to settle the level of the minimum wage. There will, of course, be a debate about that level, but let there be decisiveness about the principle for the national minimum wage is not an exercise in compassion. It is an investment in our future. It forms an essential part of the Government's strategy to provide opportunity to work, to ensure that work pays, and to allow advancement through the acquisition of skills. It is a strategy based on the understanding that in the new global economy prosperity is not won at the price of social justice. I am reminded that many of the countries with higher per capita incomes have achieved their success on the foundation of a national minimum wage.

At the age of 15, I joined the Labour party in Renfrewshire because I believed in the values and ideals which had for generations taken members of my family into the Labour movement: a commitment to the belief that while we cherish our individuality we are part of a community with shared responsibilities and linked destinies, and the belief that wealth, power and opportunity should be in the hands of the many and not the few. The Bill advances those historic ideals in the modern economy, and that is why I and my constituents will support it.

8.48 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): I congratulate the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) on his maiden speech. The House remembers his predecessor with considerable affection and his death with much sadness. Tonight, however, we heard a maiden speech that was made with a judicious balance between dignity, wisdom and generosity. I am sure that all hon. Members look forward to listening to the hon. Gentleman in the future.

This evening's subject has the capacity to excite high moral tones and to have all those in favour of the Bill reaching urgently for the pulpit. To some, it may seem like a debate about slavery all over again; one can ban slavery, but not poverty. The argument is about fair pay, but it should also be about whether pay can be realistic. Nobody is arguing that we should remove the importance of justice from employment. The question is what kind of justice the Bill will create. The President of the Board of Trade spoke of making work pay, but the danger of the Bill is that it will make the workers pay for it with their jobs.

My constituency will be badly affected by the measure. I cannot say how badly, because, like other hon. Members, I do not yet know at what level the minimum wage will be fixed. Some 11 per cent. of the work force in my constituency are engaged in tourism, and many people own small and medium-sized businesses such as newsagents. Hon. Members may have seen the survey recently published by the National Federation of Retail Newsagents. The evidence was startling: it figured that a minimum wage fixed at £3 would mean that 22 per cent. of jobs in the newsagents business would be lost, and that a minimum wage fixed at £3.50 would mean that half the jobs would be lost.

I have listened to hon. Members this evening, particularly the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond), whose work at the Low Pay Unit I respect and have followed over the years. We are all discussing poverty and, as the President of the Board of Trade said, the scandal of poverty. Nobody wants poverty in our society, but we must recognise that it is relative. There is a huge difference between poverty in the United Kingdom and poverty in India. It can be argued that we must improve the lot of everybody in our country, which is the duty of all Members of Parliament. Nobody disputes the fact that some people are badly off; the question is what we should do to make their lives better.

Would the Bill remove the "scandal of poverty", as it has been termed? I do not believe that it would, because many of the poorest households have no earners. How would the Bill help them? Low pay is concentrated among many married people and young adults, many of whom are part of households where the other partner earns a good living. The Bill would do little to help them, but the people who may need help and on whom our resources should be targeted would not be helped. How would the Bill help those caught in the poverty trap—those for whom benefits would be reduced if their earnings increase? My worry is that the Bill would transfer responsibility from the state to the employer. But who will look after people when they are laid off because of the minimum wage?

The devil in the Bill is in the detail. At best, the Bill is disingenuous; at worst, it is irresponsible. Members of Parliament will have to answer in the future for those whose hopes are dashed if the figure is fixed too low or for the lengthening dole queues if it is fixed too high. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) cited the importance of the United States, which is a comparison worth considering for a moment or two. The US minimum wage system is littered with exemptions. A few years ago, I had the good fortune to spend a year or so teaching at Harvard university, and experienced what life was like for Americans under the minimum wage system. It was not a panacea to cure all ills. The danger of the minimum wage in America is the way in which it has been continuously amended to create more exemptions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) pointed out, firms in the US with a turnover of less than $500,000 a year are exempted. If one considers the level at which the minimum wage is fixed in the US—currently $5.15 or about £3.20—and compares average earnings in America with those in the United Kingdom, the level is fixed at the equivalent of about £2.70.

Has a minimum wage eliminated the scandal of poverty in the US? Hon. Members may be aware of a conference that took place yesterday in the United States—the conference of mayors. The report on the conference was startling. Hunger and homelessness, both symbols of poverty, are rising dramatically in the US; requests for food stamps and shelter rose by 16 per cent. this year, and 70 per cent. of cities reported turning away people who desperately needed help. That is a "scandal of poverty", and it is not a good model to follow.

Low pay may be relevant to explaining away those problems, but we must be clear about one thing: a national minimum wage will not eliminate poverty. What kind of justice will we have if there are no regional variations? It sounds right, but will it work in practice? Small businesses will find it hard—21 per cent. of businesses in the UK turn over less than £37,000 a year and in Wales the figure is £31,000, so Wales is being asked to bear a particular burden in the course of implementing the Bill.

The Government speak of "flexibility plus". They aim to achieve high and stable growth and employment, but the recently released James Capel study found that that if the minimum wage is fixed at £3.50 it will add 1.5 per cent.to the UK wage bill. It will also cost 250,000 jobs. I do not want to become involved in an auction about the number of jobs involved, but all the studies agree that if the level of the minimum wage is to be meaningful it will have an impact on employment. We would be foolish, however we vote tonight, to deny such an impact. There will also be an impact on interest rates and on the economy's growth.

This subject excites strong views. The Bill is well intentioned, but I believe that it is wrong. In the name of justice it will create injustice; in the name of making work pay it will make the workers pay with their jobs. In wanting to tackle the scandal of poverty, it will do little or nothing to clear up that scandal, except shift responsibility from the state to the employer. Having sent those employers bust in some cases, it will have created unemployment. The unemployed—the very people whom Labour Members want to be liberated from the state—will then come back and make their demands on the state.

The Government's language is high handed and moralising, but I fear that the Bill will do little to get people from welfare to work and much to get them out of work and on to welfare.

8.57 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): In reply to the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward), may I say that of course the Bill is about poverty and justice, but it is a central plank of our economic policies. We cannot compete internationally on the basis of paying the lowest wages. We can never win that battle. Our future lies in developing a highly skilled productive work force competing on the basis of quality and innovation.

I have made those arguments over many years. I am very emotional about the debate because, I am proud to say, I was employed by the National Union of Public Employees when we were advancing the arguments for a minimum wage. I wrote many of the documents that made that case. We saw it as a moral argument about justice, but now we see it as an economic argument about a measure that will get the country on its feet again.

I shall give the example of an industry that is important in my area and is often regarded as one in which a minimum wage might lead to job losses—the textiles industry. Jobs have been lost in the textiles industry—because we cannot compete in the global race to the bottom with Morocco, Sri Lanka and the far east. The idea that we can do that is nonsense. We can never pay low enough wages to compete with those areas. That is not the way forward for the textiles industry.

In this country, there is a market for our local textiles. A company such as Marks and Spencer may take standard goods from overseas, but when it needs a new line or an unusual product quickly, it needs speedy, flexible, quality producers based in UK plants. That is the basis on which we must compete.

There are already minimum earnings agreements in the industry that have permitted the reconsideration of payment structures, individual piecework and so on, which can militate against the flexibility, quality and efficiency that we need for our companies to compete and win orders. A minimum wage could provide payment structures that enable us to be more efficient and more competitive.

Two companies in my constituency, Courtaulds and Coats Viyella, already have national minimum earnings levels. Colin Dyer, the chief executive of Courtaulds, was recently quoted in *The Guardian* as saying that the company was preparing itself for the minimum wage by becoming more efficient.

Decent employers do not need to be undercut by cowboys and sweatshops seeking competitive advantage. We heard earlier the quotation from Winston Churchill about bad employers undercutting the good and the worst employers undercutting the bad. That is not a route we can afford to go down.

Tourism is another important industry in my constituency and it has been mentioned by several hon. Members. Is tourism advanced by a high staff turnover, which we have partly because of low wages? In our three-star hotels, there is a staff turnover of 33 per cent. How will those hotels attract visitors compared with France, with a turnover of 19 per cent., or Germany, which has a turnover of 16 per cent?

Low pay is connected with a low level of investment and training in the skills that we need. We must compete on the high ground of skills and productivity, so I welcome the Bill.

I have two practical suggestions. First, I hope that there will be common procedures to tie up implementation of the minimum wage legislation with equal pay legislation. This is the second stage of equal pay legislation; we must co-ordinate those measures. Secondly, we must consider procedures for the annual review and continuing monitoring of the minimum wage, preferably through the Low Pay Commission.

In reply to earlier comments, I find it extraordinary that Opposition Members consider us arrogant. We are trying not to be arrogant in the way the previous Government were; they introduced legislation drawn up without consultation or consideration and with no mechanisms for making it work properly. Our Low Pay Commission will do that and it will be a good and honourable way of ensuring that the Bill works well.

After arguing for such legislation for many years, it gives me enormous pleasure to support it tonight. It is a matter of morality, social justice and equality, and it is another plank in our modernisation of Britain and building an economy fit for the future. I shall be extremely proud to vote for the Bill.

9.2 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I begin by congratulating the hon. Members for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) and for Bristol, North–West (Dr. Naysmith) on their excellent maiden speeches. I was particularly struck by their references to the high levels of unemployment in their constituencies.

[Mr. David Prior]

I, too, am aware of the great damage that long-term high unemployment does to individuals, society and family life. It is against a background of high unemployment that we consider the Bill.

In my constituency, I have many small firms engaged in the tourism and leisure industries. I have spoken to four or five companies over the past two weeks, all of whom cited cases of people who would not be working for them now if there was a national minimum wage. I think of a barman who was taken on on a casual basis. He worked almost for pocket money, but, because he was living at home with his parents, he could afford to do that. That casual barman is now the hotel manager.

I think of the thousands of casual and seasonal employees who work in the tourism industry—boys and girls doing holiday jobs, getting training and work experience; women who are topping up their husbands' income; pensioners who are doing extra work to top up their pensions. A variety of people are prepared, for all kinds of reasons, to work for relatively low wages.

I know of two people who work in a local care home. They work part time and receive a low wage, but they spend time talking to the residents of that care home, making coffee and doing jigsaw puzzles. Those sorts of jobs will not exist if there is a national minimum wage. There are many small firms in north Norfolk, and they will be hit hardest by a national minimum wage. It will apply not just to big firms in big towns but to small companies that operate in rural areas. I was struck by the plight of one constituent, who wrote:

"We . . . have a requirement for some seasonal staff, and were the above level"—

that is, the minimum wage—

"applied to them, I am sure that . . . the subsequent adjustment to all staff rates would be . . . injurious to the viability"

of the business. Labour Members should not forget the impact that a national minimum wage will have on differentials. The Food and Drink Federation has said:

"It should be clearly recognised, however, that the Potential Pressure for Maintenance of Differentials, and the Implications for Cost and Competitiveness, will be very considerable where the lowest rates of a grading structure have to be increased as a result of a national minimum wage."

All the evidence is that more Government intervention in the labour market, the social chapter and the national minimum wage will lead to higher levels of unemployment.

9.5 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate. I also thank the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) and my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) for their concise speeches, which have permitted me to participate.

We have heard much about the attitude of employers—particularly small businesses—to the minimum wage. I am glad to have this opportunity to remind my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry—who is on the Front Bench—of her visit to my constituency before the general election, during which representatives of small businesses volunteered the view that no responsible employer would have any problem with a national minimum wage.

I can also tell my hon. Friend that several of my colleagues from Sussex constituencies, some Opposition Members and I met representatives of the Sussex branch of the Confederation of British Industry in Crawley just 10 days ago. They also told us that they envisage no problems with the national minimum wage policy. That is my experience of reactions to a national minimum wage, which is not based on reports from elsewhere.

I must draw attention to the situation in my constituency. I have said before that, although Brighton, Pavilion appears to be prosperous, it suffers from very real deprivation. Research conducted by the local council and the Low Pay Unit—I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) in this area—found that, in 1995, 43 per cent. of those in full-time work in East Sussex were living below the Council of Europe's decency threshold. It found also that 74 per cent. of those in part-time work were below that threshold. That is unacceptable.

The examples from the Brighton, Pavilion jobcentre that I shall now give are equally unacceptable. The jobs offered on a typical day included a chef, with three years' experience, working until 3 am for £3.25 an hour. That is the highest rate that I shall quote. A position for a qualified, full-time hair stylist was offered at £2.66 an hour. The position of care assistant, working 12 hours per night, was offered at £20 a night. The responsibilities of that care assistant are calculated to be worth £1.66 per hour. The Bill will do much to alleviate such degrading pay offers in my constituency. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on establishing the Low Pay Commission and introducing the Bill so quickly.

I remind the House that many people in my constituency work in the retail, hotel and catering trades and that nearly a quarter of employment in my constituency is provided by them. They are jobs that were once protected by the wages councils.

Many surveys have been mentioned; I shall refer to one more. A nationwide survey was undertaken by the low pay network in 1995. It revealed that 10 per cent. of the jobs in hotels and catering in 1995 paid less than in 1993 when the wages councils were abolished. Again in 1995, 20 per cent. of jobs in retail and hairdressing—major areas of employment in my constituency—were being paid at below the levels in 1993 when the wages councils were abolished.

I am sure that my constituents will welcome the Bill, as I do. It will have my whole-hearted support and the whole-hearted support of those hard-working people of the Pavilion constituency who far too often are paid far less than they deserve for the work they do.

9.11 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have made powerful economic cases against the Bill. Instead, I shall take a few minutes to make the moral case against it. Having listened to the debate, I am aware that Labour Members feel sincerely that they are on the moral side of the argument. They have had a few uncomfortable nights recently, with the more loyal or ambitious of them being dragged through the

Lobby supporting Government policies that they think are fundamentally immoral. That being so, they clearly feel good about themselves tonight. They feel that they are on the side of good. I want to puncture that illusion.

The Bill is actively immoral because its implementation will knowingly cause people to lose their jobs. It is—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that Labour Members find it amusing that people will lose their jobs; that is not the impression that they have tried to give to their constituents.

The Deputy Prime Minister has recognised, famously, that the minimum wage will cause some people to lose their jobs. Professor Bain has said that he would be surprised if there were not some job losses. The question is whether these jobs—

Miss Geraldine Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: No. I am sorry. At this stage of the debate I cannot give way to the hon. Lady.

The professor's question is whether the jobs that would be lost would be better lost anyway. I observe in passing that those who take that view are seldom referring to their own jobs. Which people will lose their jobs? We know the answer precisely: the young and the unskilled will bear the principal brunt of these job losses. I do not find it moral that the Government are introducing a policy that will specifically make it more difficult for young people and the unskilled to find jobs.

A continuing debate is centred on exemptions. For example, should there be exemptions for trainees, for under-26-year-olds and perhaps for under-21-year-olds? What is so great about a policy that means that a policy that means that the Government are trying to find exemptions for the most vulnerable groups in society? It is clear that the level at which the national minimum wage will be set will be vital.

Broadly speaking, in other European countries where there is a minimum wage, the higher the percentage of the average wage at which the minimum wage is set, the higher is the level of youth unemployment. Many Labour Members have mentioned with pride the sectors that will be affected by the Bill if it is enacted, such as textiles, tourism and hotels. All of these—

Miss Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I shall not give way to the hon. Lady because we are approaching the replies from the Front Benches.

Miss Smith *rose—*

Mr. Green: No. I am under pressure of time and unable to give way to the hon. Lady.

The Bill is immoral because it will affect certain sectors that are staffed by some of the most dedicated people in society. I have been approached in my constituency by teachers and administrators in nursery schools who say that they employ people on very low wages precisely because those people know that jobs are not available at a higher level and because they feel a vocation for such work and are quite prepared to do it on low wages. If the minimum wage is introduced, those jobs will simply disappear and some nursery schools will close.

Another reason—it has not yet been mentioned—why the Bill is immoral is the fact that there will be so much detail at the margin, which will go some way to re-create the culture of fiddling at the edges that incomes policies introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. The Secretary of State mentioned the problems with bonus payments, benefits in kind and deductions from earnings. With all those bits and pieces around—

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I am not giving way. I am sorry, but time is limited.

All those areas brought incomes policies into disrepute and led to novel forms of payment. All that will be reintroduced in certain sectors of the economy if the minimum wage is introduced. That will make this country a less moral place as well.

The Bill is immoral because Parliament is being invited to take this decision blind. It is absurd to debate the Bill's Second Reading when we do not have its central feature—the minimum wage itself. It is bad that Parliament is asked to discuss the Bill at this stage. We should discuss it after the Low Pay Commission has reported. The Government's attitude is rather like the famous company involved in the south sea bubble that invited people to invest in it and said that they would be informed in due course of the purpose of their investment. That is effectively what the Government are asking the House to do this evening.

The Bill is immoral because it deludes people into thinking that it is an attack on poverty. It will not reduce poverty. Many of my hon. Friends produced figures that show that the people who will be affected by the minimum wage are the groups in society who are most affected by poverty.

The Bill will increase unemployment, especially for the young and unskilled. It will discourage workers from taking low-paid, socially useful work. It will re-create the culture of rule bending that surrounded incomes policies in the 1960s and 1970s. Parliament is being asked to take a decision when it has not been given the central piece of information that it requires to take that decision. The Bill also fails to address the problem of poverty.

This is not a morally uplifting Bill; it is a half-baked measure. It is a bad Bill and it deserves to be voted down.

9.17 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I realise that we are on a very tight schedule. I shall make one or two extremely important points.

Opposition Members have commented on the arrogance of the Government in setting up a Low Pay Commission before we have even debated the Bill. It is only common sense that we set up the Low Pay Commission which, despite the arguments of Opposition Members, is very representative.

The Conservatives say that what we are doing is nothing more than asking businesses to pay a wage that in turn will save the payment of benefits. I hope that

[Mr. Russell Brown]

Opposition Members do not think that there is anything to be gained by, or that people take any pride in, claiming benefits. It is degrading. People do not want to claim benefits. The argument is not simply about a decent living wage, but about people exploiting the system. The argument that businesses will have to shed jobs and that they will go to the wall is nonsense. The Bill plugs a loophole whereby people have exploited the system for many years.

I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan), who represents my neighbouring constituency, mentioned that we both come from an area which, if it is not the lowest paid, is the second lowest paid in Scotland. The argument about having a minimum wage that is not national and about there being different rates in different areas just does not hold water. I take great exception to the fact that, in some of its documentation, our local enterprise company in Dumfries and Galloway boasts that it can encourage inward investment because the area has competitive rates of pay—in other words, we pay scandalously low wages. I can tell some horror stories about that.

The cornerstone of the family is broken down when parents try to hold down two or, in many cases, three jobs to make ends meet. People have to work 50, 60 or 70 hours a week, and their children never see them. They rush backwards and forwards in and out of the house trying to hold down jobs to make ends meet to avoid joining the benefit system, which Conservative Members think is the right way to act.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the couple of minutes that I have had to make my points this evening. I hope that hon. Members will feel that it is appropriate to support the Bill.

9.20 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): It is a duty and a pleasure to congratulate the hon. Members for Bristol, North–West (Dr. Naysmith) and for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) on two of the most eloquent maiden speeches that I can remember. Both paid due tribute to their predecessors. We echo their tributes, and we look forward to hearing from both of them again.

It has been a singular feature of the debate that while Labour Members have welcomed the Bill in principle, not one was prepared to argue for the exemption or lower rate for younger people that the Government themselves have invited the Low Pay Commission to recommend.

The Opposition oppose the Bill. We believe that it is damaging for jobs and for the economy and that it will not help the lowest-paid in our society, points eloquently made by my hon. Friends the Members for Havant (Mr. Willetts), for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for Witney (Mr. Woodward) and for Ashford (Mr. Green).

The story of the minimum wage is typical of the Government's first seven months. We have seen U-turns, inconsistency, deception, ministerial rows and even, as I shall come to later, the threat of a ministerial resignation. Above all, we have seen deep unease throughout the Government about the effects of the minimum wage in practice.

The Government cannot even decide what the minimum wage is all about. The Minister of State tells us that it is about ending poverty pay. The President of the Board of Trade, launching the Bill, said that it was economically sensible. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his pre-Budget statement, said that it could have adverse effects on employment or inflation. I invite the Minister to tell us which of those aims is the Government's aim tonight.

Miss Geraldine Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: I shall give way later.

The Government cannot even make up their mind about the status of the Low Pay Commission. First, they set it up, then they rig its membership. It does not contain a single person who has run a small business in this country. Representing small business men is a single trade association worthy from Scotland who represents but 500 members.

Having boasted of setting up the commission within 90 days of taking office, 60 days later, the Government change its terms of reference. The Chancellor instructs the President of the Board of Trade to write to the commission inviting it to consider exemptions for young people and those in training.

We see exactly the same inconsistency when it comes to the level of the minimum wage.

Miss Smith: I find it ironic that for 18 years I watched the Conservative party, which was supposed to roll back the nanny state, foster unemployment in Britain, causing millions of people to live in poverty through benefit dependency. During those 18 years, we had the poll tax, North sea oil revenues were squandered, and old-age pensions were eroded. Some people still live on welfare in poverty and misery. *[Interruption.]* We are trying to do something about that. We want to get people back into employment through our welfare-to-work programme. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may heckle: they do not like it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Lady has made her point.

Mr. Fallon: I hope so, because she had long enough.

We see the same inconsistency from the Government on the level of the minimum wage. At the election, Labour's employment spokesman, now our Prime Minister, said that it should be half male median earnings, which is currently £4.61. We learn from *The Sunday Telegraph* that the President of the Board of Trade and her Minister of State favour a rate of £4 an hour. We read that the Chancellor and his senior advisers are opposed to a minimum wage much above £3.50 an hour. Perhaps the Minister of State could assist us when he winds up the debate in the style of the pocket Cicero, to which we have become accustomed, by telling us exactly what level he favours for the minimum wage. In its evidence, the Confederation of British Industry told us that the range should be between £3 and £3.20 an hour. Does the Minister agree with that?

When it comes to the coverage of the minimum wage, we find the same indecision. At the Amsterdam summit, the Prime Minister endorsed the presidency's conclusion

that wage agreements across Europe should take more account of differences in qualifications and between regions to facilitate job creation. The Minister of State told us on 20 November that there should be no regional, no sectoral and no company derogations. Exactly one week later, the Bill exempts share fishermen, makes special arrangements for agricultural workers, and excludes every 16 to 25-year-old.

Clause 39 makes special provision for some of the lower-paid in, I assume, Jersey or Guernsey. The clause is entitled,

"Power to apply Act to offshore employment."

The Government are showing touching concern for the lower-paid bankers, lawyers and trustees who reside on the islands of Jersey and Guernsey.

More seriously, the Minister of State, who said that there would be no exemptions, has clearly forgotten that, in a written answer on 28 July, he guaranteed that the Bill would

"not penalise occupational training activity, including . . . training as child-carers as part of the Government's welfare-to-work scheme."—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1997; Vol. 299, c. 64.]

We shall deal with that issue in Committee.

The President of Board of Trade was careful to invite the commission to consider a wider definition of an hourly rate. She took the trouble to mention precisely what the CBI has called for, which is that the rate should include consideration of benefits in kind, such as board and lodging, meals, tips and pension contributions. I wonder whether she agrees with the CBI, which wants all new employees to be exempted from the minimum wage for the first six months of their employment. Does she agree with the Engineering Employers Federation, which wants all modern apprenticeships and all training to be exempted?

Mrs. Beckett: I think that the hon. Gentleman has been misinformed. That is not what the CBI said. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the full text of what Mr. Turner said, he will see that Mr. Turner was talking about training. I am not criticising the hon. Gentleman, because that is how what was said was reported in the press, but I understand that it is not what Mr. Turner said or what he meant to convey. He was talking about people in training.

Mr. Fallon: The President of the Board of Trade is a busy lady, but may I invite her to read the CBI's full evidence to the Low Pay Commission? I think that it puts the matter beyond all doubt.

There is one Minister who, for all his many faults and other characteristics, sees the dangers of an inflexible national rate, and the unemployment that may well result. Throughout the autumn, he argued for the power in the Bill to vary the rate according to region, according to sector and according to size of business. When his advice to the President of the Board of Trade was leaked to *The Guardian*, he hastily wrote to that newspaper to explain why such a power was needed. He wrote:

"The point I raised in correspondence . . . was a practical one, as to whether the draft Bill as worded allowed Ministers sufficient flexibility to refine policy in the light of experience of the actual functioning of the national minimum wage."

He knows perfectly well that hundreds of thousands of jobs could be lost if an inflexible rate was insisted on, but that was not the view that was finally taken. We now learn of a furious dispute between the Minister without Portfolio and the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: Let me finish. I quote from *The Independent on Sunday*, which carried the headline:

"Labour covers up minister's revolt . . . McCartney tried to resign".

I have to give the House some rather sad news. The Prime Minister, we understand,

"would happily have accepted Mr. McCartney's resignation".

That was "suggested at Westminster", not by Conservative Members. We look forward to the Minister's continuing to fight his battles.

Mr. MacShane: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given way at this point, when he was talking about resignation. Surely he could have mentioned at the beginning of his speech that, according to the Register of Members' Interests, he is a director of a nursery school organisation. He has remunerated employment as an adviser to nursing homes, which are among the worst employers in terms of low pay. If it comes to resignation, the hon. Gentleman has no right to stand at the Dispatch Box tonight.

Mr. Fallon: Interventions such as that are not worthy of comment.

I now come to the biggest deception visited on the debate by the Government. They have claimed, month after month, that business organisations are in favour of the Bill. Those who look at the evidence supplied to the Low Pay Commission—and we have looked at it—will see that not a single business organisation supports the principle of a statutory minimum wage. Indeed, most business organisations see it as entirely the wrong way in which to tackle poverty.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) raised a point earlier, and I now wonder whether it would not have been appropriate for the Opposition spokesman to declare his interest at the beginning of his speech. As we know, nursing homes pay very low wages. I suggest that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has a direct vested interest in the debate, and that he should have declared it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has acted entirely properly. This is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Fallon: I am sorry that Labour Members are not prepared to address the argument.

The Engineering Employers Federation says that it does not support the introduction of a national minimum wage because of its effect on differentials and the increased cost of subcontracted services.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Fallon: I have given way generously.

[Mr. Fallon]

The CBI says:

"Business opposes a national minimum wage, which would undermine flexibility and is a poor way to tackle poverty."

Indeed, the CBI makes it clear that a minimum wage could result in

"rising prices, business closures and unemployment."

Mr. MacShane: It is a disgrace.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) cannot behave in that manner. He must give the hon. Member for Sevenoaks a hearing.

Mr. Sheerman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have ruled on the previous point of order, so I hope that it is not on the same matter.

Mr. Sheerman: On a separate, but related matter, those of us who have been in the House for some time always understood that, before one made a speech, one declared one's interest, if there was a specific interest. Have the rules changed, so that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen do not have to declare any interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The declaration of interest rule is clear. That is what the Register of Members' Interests is for, and hon. Members know their responsibilities. I am saying that that is not a matter for the occupant of the Chair and that the speech of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks is perfectly in order.

Mr. Fallon: The CBI has made it clear that

"Even a modest minimum, set around the £3 mark, could lead to job losses unless wage differentials are squeezed."

I pointed out to the President of the Board of Trade that the Federation of Small Businesses, too, is opposed to a statutory minimum wage in principle. It is no use the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry—who is covering up the fact that she has failed to exempt small firms from the legislation—saying that she once attended a conference at which the federation said that it would like a sensibly negotiated minimum wage. It may have supported a sensibly negotiated minimum wage. The point is that it wanted to negotiate it and, in its manifesto, it remains opposed to a statutory minimum wage.

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: No. I have given way generously. I am taking up the time of the Minister of State.

Business is clear that jobs will be lost. The CBI is clear that even if—

Mrs. Roche *rose—*

Mr. Fallon: I give way.

Mrs. Roche: I was privileged to speak at the annual meeting of the Federation of Small Businesses. It had a debate on the issue and, by a resounding majority, it passed a resolution in favour of a sensibly negotiated minimum wage. Why cannot the hon. Gentleman accept the democratic position? Why cannot he accept that fact, even if he does not like it?

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Lady has walked straight into the trap. Immediately after that vote by the federation, Mr. Bill Knox, chairman of its employment affairs committee, reminded delegates that the federation opposed the imposition of a statutory minimum wage, but advised that the motion as it stood was not a proposal for such. That deals with that point.

Business is clear that jobs will be lost. The CBI is clear that jobs will be lost. The North-East chamber of commerce says that 50 per cent. of employers will cut their work force, that 61 per cent. of employers believe that higher-paid employees will seek to maintain differentials and that 63 per cent. of employers want different rates by region.

In the KPMG study that it commissioned, the British Hospitality Association, which represents the important hotel and tourism industry, says that at a rate of £3.50 an hour, 32,000 jobs will be destroyed in the industry. The Department of Trade and Industry's report, which the President of the Board of Trade was rather coy about, and which was prepared by Mr. Paul Lanser, an official in her Department—

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, it is not for me to argue with the occupant of the Chair or to dispute your ruling in any way, but, as I understand it, an advocacy rule was passed in a resolution of the House on 6 November 1995. It extended an earlier resolution prohibiting hon. Members from engaging in advocacy on behalf of outside bodies or persons from whom they receive payment. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) is a director and heavily involved in the nursery—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, and the House has decided that any complaint of the nature that the hon. Gentleman raises should be referred to him. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Commissioner.

Mr. Fallon: A Department of Trade and Industry study, which was prepared by Mr. Paul Lanser, an official in that Department, estimates the employment losses from a minimum wage set at various rates. At a rate of £3.50, assuming a half restoration of differentials, the job loss was 974,000. There is no point in Ministers saying that that was before the election, because we are living now with their proposals, and that estimate is as valid now as it was then. If the Minister does not think that 1 million jobs are at risk, perhaps she could give us the latest estimate that has been provided for her.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: No. I am already eating into the Minister's time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has already said how the Deputy Prime Minister admitted that there would be some shake-out. He said:

"any silly fool knew that".

Those words remain true.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Fallon: I am not giving way again.

The Prime Minister has commented on the potential job losses from the minimum wage. He wrapped it up in rather weasel language. I think that when he wrote to *The Independent*, he was courting the left. He stated:

"I have not accepted that the minimum wage will cost jobs . . . I have accepted that econometric models indicate a potential jobs impact".

That is exactly the point.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. The hon. Gentleman does not intend to give way.

Mr. Fallon: It is no comfort to those who will be thrown out of work by the Bill to be told that an econometric model has been measuring the potential impact on their jobs. It is no comfort to those whose low-skilled jobs will disappear, and such jobs are often the first to start up the ladder. Through the Bill, the Government are kicking that ladder away for those who are least able to compete—the unskilled, the young, the elderly, the most vulnerable in our society. The Bill will be deeply damaging.

The Chancellor accepts that the Bill will increase inflation; add to public spending; hit school and hospital budgets; damage competitiveness; hammer small businesses, which are exempted in other countries from the minimum wage; and discourage people from adding to their training and seeking higher qualifications. Above all, it will cost jobs. That is why we oppose it. Even if business had negotiated the amount of the minimum wage and if there were some flexibility for small businesses, which there is not, and regional variations, which there are not, we would still oppose this attack on jobs.

We warn the Government that if unemployment rises—and we think that it will as a direct consequence of the Bill—they will bear the responsibility for pricing the most vulnerable people in our society out of jobs and destroying their lifeline to a better future. That is why we oppose the Bill.

9.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has eaten considerably into the time available for my speech. Consequently, I intend to put the Government's case forcefully without interventions from him or from other Opposition Members.

However, the hon. Gentleman paid a very eloquent tribute to the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North–West (Dr. Naysmith), for which I thank him. My hon. Friend not only made a very thoughtful speech but paid tribute to his predecessor, whom I knew and occasionally disagreed with. I welcome that tribute. I am also absolutely sure that my hon. Friend will be a significant player in the House on behalf of his constituents and on behalf of business in Bristol, North-West.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) showed his mettle in a very difficult by-election. He paid tribute to his predecessor who was lost in tragic circumstances. I am absolutely sure that my hon. Friend will make his mark in this place and will prove himself one of the best representatives that Scotland has ever sent to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) was, as usual, eloquent and knowledgeable on minimum wage issues. She shared her original views on the issue and told the House how she has contributed over the past few years to the minimum wage debate. I look forward to working with her during the Bill's passage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), as usual, made an eloquent and well-argued case. He explained why employer after employer in the British hospitality industry supports the principle of a minimum wage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) clearly explained how vulnerable workers were damaged when the previous Tory Government withdrew basic rights to minimum wages by abolishing wages councils.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) has for more than two decades been one of those who have kept the flag flying on behalf of tens of thousands of low-paid workers in Britain. I look forward to the announcement of the Scrooge of the Year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) explained again just what happens in an inner-city constituency after 18 years of Tory Government hammering away at low-paid workers, isolating them, and refusing both to accept the necessity of minimum wages and to do something about poverty pay.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) spoke eloquently about problems of poverty in Britain's lowest paid constituency. I look forward to working with her in the campaign.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) spoke of business's support for the minimum wage in his constituency.

I shall now deal with the speech of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks and his remarks about me. May I point out that the only hon. Member I know of who quit politics because he could not reach agreement with his leader is the former Secretary of State for Wales? He is the quitter, not me. He is also the loser. He fought for the leadership of his party, and he lost. He fought to become Leader of the Opposition and lost. He is the loser, not me. As for visiting the Prime Minister at No. 10 Downing street, he always left his Prime Minister without agreement. When I leave my Prime Minister, I always have an agreement.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. McCartney: I am not giving way. The right hon. Gentleman will have plenty of time to speak in January, if he wants to join us in the Bill's Committee stage.

[Mr. McCartney]

This has been one of the happiest days of my life—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but for almost three decades—

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister at the Dispatch Box to give way one moment to an Opposition Front Bencher and then—the next moment, under instructions from the Secretary of State—to turn round and say, "No, I don't give way after all"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the hon. Gentleman who has the Floor, not for the Chair.

Mr. McCartney: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman, who is a new Member. When one is only 5 ft tall, it is difficult for people to know whether you are standing or sitting. For the record, I am standing.

I want to place on the record my thanks to those who worked with me in opposition in formulating this policy, campaigning in the country and managing the fat-cat campaign, which is probably one of the most successful campaigns in British political history. There was a mammoth consultation with business—more than 200 individual meetings and discussions—in advance of our publishing proposals for the Low Pay Commission and the national minimum wage. That culminated in a Labour victory on 1 May.

Today's debate has been characterised, as usual, by the Tory suspects in the low-pay brigade. They are smug, self-centred and complacent in the extreme. I want to talk about the real-life issues of low pay. Nearly 1 million of our fellow citizens earn less than £2.50 an hour, and 750,000 families receive in-work benefits such as family credit. They have a full-time job all week and still cannot afford to live. Eighteen years of Tory rule has left the gap between the poor and rich at its largest since the 1880s.

I shall return to the plight of low-paid workers and their families in a moment, but I want to allow myself a little cheer. As a former low-paid worker, I never dreamt that I would ever be a Member of Parliament, let alone a Minister standing at this Dispatch Box replying to an historic debate that would lead to Britain's first truly national minimum wage. Many low-paid workers in Britain are unsung heroes every day of the week. They seek to gain justice.

I know what happens. I lost count of the number of jobs I lost or from which I was sacked. I used to be known as DCM McCartney—don't come back on Monday. Only last week, I was at a seminar on the national minimum wage and there was an employer in the audience who had sacked me. He was there to support the introduction of a minimum wage. That is real progress. That is new Labour and a new minimum wage.

Low-paid workers never have a voice; they are powerless and isolated. Throughout this debate, there has not been a clear understanding of what it means to be low paid. Some people work from home and have caring responsibilities, but are exploited for having those responsibilities. The low paid are fearful of speaking out and fear being given the sack. They are frightened of not being able to pay their own way or provide for their children—they come first and the parents go without. We do not have to tell low-paid workers about low pay because they live it seven days a week, 365 days a year, year in, year out.

Opposition Members never acknowledge that some low-paid workers have more than one job in a day. Some women work early morning, afternoon and evening because they earn only £1 an hour. To help their family out of poverty, they work hour after hour in undignified circumstances. With a national minimum wage, the Labour Government are coming to the rescue of those women.

The low paid are excluded from the mainstream. They cannot afford school trips for their kids, family outings or days out and sometimes cannot afford a present for their children on their birthday. That is the reality—that is what it is about. This is about feeling valued and having personal dignity when an employer is treating you no better than a dog. We want to introduce respect and fairness. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have prolonged conversations in the House while someone is addressing hon. Members. The House must come to order.

Mr. McCartney: I do not expect to receive respect from Opposition Members, but I expect them to respect the low paid.

The minimum wage is vital to ending the scandal of poverty pay; it is not only social justice, but it makes good economic sense. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade set out eloquently the economic case for the introduction of a national minimum wage.

It has been said that setting up the Low Pay Commission without consultation was arrogant. The policy was in our manifesto and was overwhelmingly endorsed by the British people. The commission's members were selected by the Nolan public appointments procedure; advertisements were placed in the national press. They have been appointed for their knowledge, skills, business backgrounds and understanding of labour market activity. I strongly object to Opposition Members impugning the character of many of those people who have given their time to the Low Pay Commission for the public good, at the expense of their own time and companies to ensure the successful launch of a national minimum wage.

The commission is an independent organisation which will report on the initial rate for the minimum wage; it will consider exemptions for young people who are in training, the methods of calculation, the economic circumstances at the time and the impact on small and medium-sized businesses.

We have been consulting nationwide and have received more than 500 responses, which are overwhelmingly in favour of the principle of a national minimum wage. When the commission has concluded its report, we shall report back to the House, which will debate the regulations. This Government are happy not only to consult, but to carry out their election promises at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: No, I shall not give way.

After 18 years of Tory control in this country, low pay is everywhere—in rural areas, in urban areas, in the north, south, east and west. That is the Tories' legacy. In London, 87,000 people earn less than £2.50 an hour. In the south-west, 87,000 people earn less than £2.50 an hour. In London, 55,000 families require in-work benefits at the end of the week. The figure is the same for the south-west. It is not regional rates that we need, but the quick introduction of a national minimum wage to help end poverty in the workplace.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks said that there was no support among business for the minimum wage—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. McCartney: It is okay—I am standing.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks kept trying to say that the Federation of Small Businesses did not vote in support of the minimum wage, but I am pleased to give him the result of the ballot. There were 23,757 in favour of the motion; there were 18,473 against—a majority of 57 per cent. over 43 per cent. The problem is that Opposition Members are not good at democracy and cannot accept the decision.

Yesterday, I received a letter from the head of Bass, which stated:

"Bass supports the principle of a minimum wage".

It is interesting to note why it says that. It has admitted that in certain parts of its business it has a staff turnover of 100 per cent. a year. That means that 50,000 people a year leave the company's employment. The purpose of the national minimum wage is to ensure quality investment in training and education and the ability for people to earn a good wage so that they can remain in employment.

The Rank organisation wrote to me yesterday and said:

"Rank are responsible employers and, in principle, are not opposed to a national minimum wage".

Tesco wrote to me this morning and said:

"Tesco has stated for several years that it does not see any problems with a National Minimum Wage."

As an example of good employment, employers and trade unions can work together in a modern, progressive and evolving way to further the interests of staff and shareholders.

There is one company that has not written: Asda, the company of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman). It is no wonder, as he is the man who says that the minimum wage will cost 350,000 jobs. As chairman of Asda, last year he received £2.2 million, made up of a £551,000 salary, plus performance-related bonuses. The Asda group's pre-tax profit was just over £400 million. There is hypocrisy and double standards. Business survey after business survey supports the minimum wage.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham is isolated. Few businesses support him; they have all deserted the Tories. Businesses want to get on and succeed, and to produce quality goods and services. They are sick and tired of being undercut by the cowboys. I ask my hon. Friends to go into the Lobby tonight on behalf on low-paid workers and to make sure that the Tories do not get away for even another hour with the concept that employers should pay people £1 an hour. My hon. Friends should support the Bill.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 387, Noes 145.

Division No. 120] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil

Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arness, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*

Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. James Cran.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the National Minimum Wage Bill it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred under the Act by a Minister of the Crown or government department or by a body performing functions on behalf of the Crown; and

(b) any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act; and

(2) the making of payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Dafydd Wigley be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

Bypasses (North-east Hertfordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise the subject of bypasses for north-east Hertfordshire. My constituency contains the Letchworth garden city, small market towns such as Royston, Baldock and Buntingford, and many small villages. This debate is about heavy, noisy, polluting traffic that goes through the heart of two small market towns—Baldock and Royston—and four small villages—Thundridge, Wadesmill, Colliers End and High Cross, all of which are in my constituency.

The three road schemes that have been proposed would make a real difference to those communities. I shall deal first with Baldock. I have lived in Royston for some 16 years and have travelled almost every day to or through Baldock. As one goes down the hill, morning or evening, from Royston towards Baldock, there is an immense queue of traffic—lorries and cars streaming back from Baldock all the way to the dual carriageway some half a mile away.

The problem has been identified as a major traffic bottleneck for some 40 years. The A505 is an important road to my constituency, not only for those who live in the area but for those trying to do business in Royston, Letchworth and Baldock. The need for a bypass has long been recognised. Residents feel inconvenienced by the traffic, the delays interfere with commercial traffic and local people fear the pollution that it causes. The local pressure group, the Campaign against Continued Traffic Damage to Children, led by Mr. Gingell, has for years been asking for

"fair, just and compassionate consideration to the health interests of Baldock children"

who walk to school and live against a background of heavy traffic and pollution.

Since I was elected in 1992, I have been pressing for action. In 1995, we finally had a public inquiry, which led to the granting of planning permission and to the statutory orders that are now in place. The bypass project could therefore go ahead now if the money could be found. Hertfordshire county council considers this its first priority as a public-private partnership project, but feels that it needs help from the Government with the start-up costs for the project—the cost of the financial and legal experts to explore, negotiate and conclude the award of the contract. The cost is quite small—only £500,000 spread over three years.

I know that officials from the Minister's Department are in discussions with the Hertfordshire county council. My first plea to the Minister is this: after all those years of effort, now that we have reached the point where the road could be built, is it not possible to find £500,000, so that this public-private partnership of such high priority to Hertfordshire and to my constituency can go ahead? That is surely not such a large sum to resolve a huge problem for my constituents.

I notice the hon. Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) in her place. I imagine that that project would also help her constituents, many of whom travel to work in my constituency, just as many of my constituents travel to work in hers.

The second project concerns the A10. I notice in his place my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who has campaigned for many years for the Wadesmill to Puckeridge bypass.

As one drives north on the A10 from Hertford, one goes through the dual carriageway at Ware and comes to a narrow section of single carriageway, which starts at Thundridge and passes through the centre of that village, Wadesmill, Colliers End and High Cross. This is a trunk road with a heavy toll of traffic.

Many of the inhabitants, including the elderly, children and the disabled, are effectively denied access on foot to other parts of the village because of the monstrous stream of heavy vehicles running through the middle of tiny villages. The accident record has always been bad on that stretch of road, but it is worsening, and the pressures will exacerbate the situation.

The traffic to Stansted airport is increasing. The passenger volumes proposed for Stansted are to increase from 5 million a year to 15 million a year. All that will have an effect on the narrow stretch of road that is one of the natural routes into London or across country from Stansted airport.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Does he accept that, in line with the Government's current policy of looking at the environmental damage caused by traffic congestion, the bypass, at modest cost, would bring enormous environmental advantages to the villages that would be bypassed by it, and thereby improve hugely the life of the children and others who live on the congested narrow A10 passage between Wadesmill and Puckeridge?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend and Mr. Harry Tee, who has been leading the campaign for the bypass, have made that point at public meetings and had huge support from local residents, many of whom have petitioned on the matter for some years. Not only would there be an environmental benefit to the villages, but the route of the bypass would not create any environmental damage, because it would not go deep into the apron of the nearby countryside.

There are many listed buildings in east Hertfordshire along the road—homes right next to the road—and there are numerous awkward private accesses to the road. Road conditions that are already poor, with poor gradient, camber and visibility, have the additional problem of awkward accesses from private homes on to a major trunk road.

County Councillor David Beatty, who has been campaigning for some time, points out that pollution from the lorries is blown from the road into two primary schools at Thundridge and High Cross that abut the road. It is not satisfactory for that to continue. If the Minister drove up that road, as she may have done, she would see sign after sign on listed buildings and homes adjacent to the road saying "Bypass Now". That is the plea that I am making tonight.

The scheme has huge public support and full planning permission—all the statutory orders that it needs. It is ready to go. The county council is now suggesting, in conjunction with East Hertfordshire district council, that in terms of the Government's consultation document, "What role for trunk roads in England?", all the

significant criteria exist for a bypass to be built. In that context, I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to including the scheme in the trunk roads programme.

Finally, I turn to the matter of Royston, which is situated where the A10 and A505 roads meet. At the crossroads, the Roy stone—an ancient base for a cross which has been there since mediaeval times—gives the town its name. Although there is a bypass of the A505 from west to east, there is demand in Royston for a bypass of the A10, which would complete the traffic measures for that town.

At present, heavy traffic passes through the centre of Royston. The problem was studied by consultants for the Department of Transport and, in 1994, the Highways Agency announced that it had recommended that bypasses be built at both Royston and Harston in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who is in his place tonight. The then Minister decided not to proceed immediately, but agreed to meet me and County Councillor Doyle, District Councillor Smith and Town Mayor Kate Evans. We met John Watts on 26 October 1994 to press the case for a Royston south-east bypass. The Minister agreed to a package of improvements on the A10 south of Royston costing £200,000 and he promised to keep the case for a bypass under review.

I pay tribute to the Royston campaigners—particularly the late Peter Ratcliff—and ask the Minister for an assurance that the proposed Royston bypass will be kept under review. What are the prospects of the bypass going ahead under the Government's new regime? Heavy traffic pours down Melbourne road in Royston, which is used by children who attend the main schools in the town that are located on the other side of the A10. The hospital is also situated on the A10 and residents who wish to visit it must cross a stream of heavy traffic.

Those considerations—and the fact that heavy lorries have consistently knocked down the railings near the cinema in the centre of Royston together with other problems of that sort—have led to a demand for action. I ask the Minister to do a hat trick for north-east Hertfordshire and give the three schemes a fair wind.

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate the hon. Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on securing the debate and on his generosity not only in allowing an intervention from the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) but in highlighting the attendance in the Chamber of my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). The number of hon. Members gathered for this Adjournment debate tonight clearly illustrates the importance of the topic that we are discussing.

The case put by the hon. Member for North–East Hertfordshire was not only eloquent and informed, but highlighted a problem in his constituency and the immediate area that I am sure he realises can be replicated throughout the United Kingdom. Concerns about safety, environmental pollution and the economic impact of traffic congestion affect everyone in the country. That is why the Government have embarked on the roads review and the consultation process and why we are committed to publishing next year a White Paper on which our integrated transport strategy will build.

Before I address the specific concerns raised this evening, it may be helpful if I define the overall thrust of our integrated transport policies and the stage that we have reached in the consultation process. Our consultation document on developing an integrated transport policy was published in August. We are aiming at a shift away from the fragmented provision of infrastructure and services to an integrated approach that will serve the country's needs for a strong economy, a sustainable environment and an inclusive society—all issues on which the hon. Gentleman touched in his opening remarks. Good communications are essential to that improved quality of life, but we must reduce our over-dependence on the car and the lorry if we are not to be choked by increasing pollution and gridlocked by increasing congestion. Our integrated transport policy consultations have received about 6,500 replies. We are analysing those responses and preparing for the publication of a White Paper next year.

We decided that our roads review should be conducted as openly as possible. In July, we published a two-volume consultation document entitled "What Role for Trunk Roads in England?", a document to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Volume 1 invited comments on general policy issues while volume 2 set out the position in each region and explained the schemes in the roads programme inherited from the previous Government. No schemes were included in the inherited programme as they had already been dropped. However, we have said that we are not ruling out schemes outside the inherited programme if they meet the five roads review criteria of integration, accessibility, safety, economy and the environment, and also rate a sufficiently high priority.

We intend that the output of the roads review should include, first, a short-term investment programme and, secondly, a programme of studies to consider the remaining problems, from which we shall develop the medium and longer-term investment programme.

To help us decide what should go into the short-term investment programme, we are developing a new appraisal framework that will enable us to see how far each proposal will tackle the problem in question, and how it will measure up against the five review criteria to which I have referred. We are not, need I say, anti-car. Indeed, we recognise that there are some problems to which road construction is the only answer. However, before we wish to sign up to new road building we wish to be clear that all other options have been considered, including public transport improvements, demand management and traffic management.

I have said that we had a good response to the consultation process. We organised consultation exercises on a regional basis to encourage debate in each area about the needs and priorities. This is much in line with our intention to strengthen the English regions and encourage partnership, co-ordination of programmes and local decision making. We do not want everything to be directed from London.

Our recent publication of the White Paper entitled "Building Partnerships for Prosperity", with its proposals for new regional development agencies, shows the direction in which we wish to move. The Government envisage that RDAs will influence the development of integrated transport strategies for each region. Their exact role will be considered further as part of our work on the integrated transport White Paper.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

As part of the roads review consultation exercise for the eastern region, which includes the hon. Gentleman's constituency, the Government Office conducted two working sessions for local transport authorities, business and environmental interests at which every trunk road in the region was examined in detail. The results of that exercise were fed into a regional conference on integrated transport on 23 October, which was attended by more than 200 delegates. This process allowed plenty of time for delegates to contribute to the consultations following these events.

On 3 December, my noble Friend the Minister for roads invited all hon. Members from constituencies in the eastern region to hear a summary of the consultation results and to put their points direct to her. I know that the hon. Gentleman was unable to attend that meeting due to his duties as a Whip, but I hope that he will be able to attend the further meeting that has been arranged for 20 January. We regard it as important for Members to be able to make representations directly to the Minister. All these various strands of consultation will feed into our decision-making process.

The responses from the regional consultation indicate that local bypasses are generally popular and seen as valuable on environmental and safety grounds, which is a point that the hon. Gentleman made. Indeed, the eastern region office has received more than 300 letters about trunk road schemes in the region.

I move on to the specific issues to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. All remaining improvement schemes for the A10 were withdrawn from the programme in 1996. The Wadesmill, High Cross and Colliers End bypass had successfully cleared public inquiry so its removal from the programme caused no small consternation in all those communities along the A10 that would have benefited.

In the regional consultation, the argument for the reinstatement of the Wadesmill scheme accorded with the views that the hon. Gentleman expressed this evening. The regional consultation exercise has also considered which roads need to be managed nationally. One view was that the A10, lying between the A1 and M11, could be de-trunked and managed locally by Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire county councils. Preliminary discussions were held some time ago between the Highways Agency and the county councils and some of the works identified are being put in hand. However, a decision on de-trunking will not be made in advance on the review. In the meantime, the planning protection for the A10 Wadesmill, High Cross and Colliers End bypass is being maintained.

No proposal for an A10 Royston south-east bypass has featured in the trunk road programme, but I am aware than the hon. Gentleman and residents of Royston have pressed for the inclusion of such a scheme for some years. It would be impossible for any Royston bypass to be included in the short-term programme, as no preparatory work has been done. As I explained earlier, besides the short-term investment programme, our review will also propose corridor studies to bring forward strategies for longer-term development of the trunk road network.

At this stage in the consultation process, I am unable to give any indication as to the likelihood of either scheme featuring in the final programme, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that his representations will receive the most careful consideration.

I will deal with the A505 Baldock bypass separately, as it is a local scheme being promoted, as the hon. Gentleman said, by Hertfordshire county council. It is not part of the trunk road review. The £33 million bypass was successfully taken through public inquiry in 1995, but it has not been started, as very few major schemes have been started in the past two years. In our guidance for this year's transport policies and programme submissions, we have warned local authorities that it is very unlikely that any major schemes will start construction in 1998–99. In Hertfordshire's latest TPP, the main works are shown to start in July 1999, but there is a considerable amount of archaeological investigation to do on site before construction work can start. There are also supplementary orders to progress.

In view of the difficulties in obtaining traditional funding, Hertfordshire has considered taking the project forward by using the local authority private finance initiative. Indeed, as the hon. Gentleman said, it has had preliminary discussions with my officials to explore the work that would be needed to promote such a project. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the council is concerned that it may have to invest considerably more resources in the project, in preparing a PFI contract, without any guarantee of success.

Generally, we do not fund scheme preparation, and grants become payable only in the year in which the works start. Therefore, we would not normally fund such preparation, but we have allocated a further £200 million for private finance transport schemes, and will consider again the difficulties that authorities have in funding the cost of contract preparation, and the uncertainty inherent in the process.

The Government's approach to projects where authorities seek a partnership with the private sector are clear. Over recent months, the Government have acted on their commitment to deliver on public-private partnerships in the local authority sector. We have taken three major steps. The new Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 has removed legal barriers for authorities. The level of 1998–99 investment that we are prepared to back has been announced—at £500 million this is double the resources available this year. Last week, we announced the criteria for new streamlined procedures to give the private sector and local authorities greater assurance—at an earlier stage—that commercially viable projects that accord with Government priorities will secure support.

Government Departments, the, Treasury task force, the Local Government Association—through the public-private partnership programme, the 4Ps—and local authorities will work together in promoting projects that are high priority and viable propositions.

I am aware that, because it is new, authorities face different costs in developing project procurement cases using the design, build, finance and operate—DBFO—route. At present, this is still an expensive process because there are very few precedents. However, the costs will fall as the documentation and procedures become familiar.

For road schemes, my Department has released to the 4Ps the model contract used by the Highways Agency for eight DBFO roads. While this needs further work to fit the circumstances of local authority projects, it is still a substantial contribution to minimising the costs.

The hon. Gentleman asks that we should go further and give direct financial support to authorities for their initial costs. However, the Government must consider the case for any such support in the context of the many other bids that we receive from authorities each year.

Before the House rises for the recess, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport will announce the TPP settlement for 1998–99. I cannot prejudge the announcement now, but every year more worthwhile projects are submitted than can possibly be afforded. Authorities have already been warned that the available funding is likely to be tightly constrained.

I repeat that I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing these interesting matters to the attention of the House. I welcome the debate and the points made by the hon. Gentleman in support of bypass schemes in north-east Hertfordshire. I hope that he will be able to attend the meeting with my noble Friend the Minister for Roads in the new year to make a further contribution to the consultation process.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will realise that I am unable to give any of the assurances that he seeks about these schemes tonight as we are still in the middle of the consultation process, but I reassure him again that the proposals that he has put forward will be considered very carefully.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 December 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I am a member of the British delegation to the Council of Europe and the rapporteur of its social, health and family affairs committee, which is preparing a report on the dangers of asbestos to workers and to the environment. That is why I raise the matter on this motion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) has been active in the House on the issue of asbestos: he recently secured a debate on the subject. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), has been supportive, and in June this year, Lord Howie introduced a debate on asbestos in the other place. I welcome the interest shown by Parliament in this issue since the election.

Medical reports show the serious effects that are suffered by people who have worked with asbestos. Sadly, it causes a large number of deaths. The Construction Safety Campaign estimates that about 3,500 people die every year as a result of working with asbestos. People are deeply concerned: they have a fear of contact with asbestos when it is exposed in housing estates, schools, hospitals and offices. Those concerns are voiced in many other countries.

The Council of Europe is the largest political assembly in Europe, with 40 member states. Although the western European members have expressed their deep concern, the newer members from eastern Europe are sadly only now learning of the dangers of working with asbestos and the effects that it has on the environment. There is clear evidence that the safeguards that we and many other countries have are not always applied in the new member states of the Council of Europe.

The United Kingdom, especially with a Labour Government, can show by its record the leadership that should be followed by all member states of the Council Europe over this highly dangerous material. Materials containing asbestos, particularly building materials, have been imported into this country from eastern European countries. The criticism and complaint that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone and I have is that those materials are often poorly labelled. They are often much cheaper than products that are made in this country, and there is no clear indication that they contain asbestos. The Council of Europe report calls for all materials to be properly labelled.

Those of us who want a complete ban on such material have been greatly helped by the French Government, who have imposed a complete ban on asbestos in France. Many other European countries, especially in Scandinavia, have also been very supportive. Some countries, of which Canada is one, are campaigning hard to ensure that no proper restrictions are placed on the use of asbestos. At a meeting that I attended in Strasbourg, some representatives of those countries told me that the type of asbestos now in use is no longer dangerous if properly used. That did not impress me; nor does it impress medical experts or the Health and Safety Executive.

We seek a complete ban on any materials that contain asbestos. There are substitutes, for which there is a market, and they are not expensive to produce. Some British companies use alternatives, and I welcome their action and support. I would welcome the Government's full support for the Council of Europe recommendations. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be able to say that, as legislation tightens on the use of asbestos in Europe, unscrupulous companies and individuals will not be allowed to export it to third-world countries which would not be fully aware of the enormous dangers that asbestos poses to people and the environment.

Asbestos and its uses, its removal from buildings and the protection that must be provided for people who work with it, are well known, but there are still reports of abuses. That is why many of us, in this country and in many others, have called for the material to be banned. That view is supported by many organisations, overwhelmingly by medical opinion, and by many trade unions.

I pay tribute to my trade union, the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, and also to the GMB Union. I am delighted that all unions support the action we seek. I look to the Government to strengthen legislation on action against those who put workers and communities at risk. Plainly, there are such people in this country.

In January, we take over the presidency of the European Union. The European Parliament supports the work on asbestos that is being carried out by the Council of Europe. They are two different political organisations, but they interrelate on that work. I look to our Government and Prime Minister to place this country in the forefront in seeking action, and to lead the campaign in Europe against asbestos. A successful conclusion to that campaign could be one of the major achievements of our presidency, and it would be warmly welcomed by all those who value the health and safety of working people and our environment.

9.43 am

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for the detailed and dedicated work that he has described. My constituents are much more sympathetic to his cause than to the cause of banning beef on the bone, about which they are deeply outraged.

I pay tribute to many people in my constituency for their enormous effort in promoting plans to create a new community hospital in Farnham for the 21st century. For some years, there has been deep uncertainty and unhappiness about Farnham hospital's appropriate role. As in many parts of the country, in my area there has

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

been major investment in district general hospitals, in Guildford and Frimley. There are now magnificent state-of-the-art hospitals providing care for which people would previously have had to travel to London. However, they left a question mark over the role and nature of community hospitals. As general practitioners provide ever-rising standards of care, how should the purpose of such hospitals be identified?

Farnham hospital used to have 150 beds. It was unrealistic to fight many of the changes because we knew that fashions in modern medicine require centres of excellence to serve large populations. A year ago, there were plans for a new hospital, but they did not come to fruition.

After much uncertainty, and even the suggestion that it should be a bedless hospital, I am delighted to report that, following the combination of the two local health authorities, the local trust, the community health council and action teams worked together in a constructive, enlightened and productive manner to formulate proposals which mean that there may be a new 40-bed hospital at Farnham, a new health centre to incorporate local GPs, all of whom are fiercely independent but were working in totally inadequate, cramped accommodation.

There will be a new nursing home for the elderly and mentally infirm, a facility for which there is a growing need. There will also be a large range of out-patient, day hospital and diagnostic services. Above all, a mix of rehabilitation, extended care and stroke care will be provided at the new community hospital, although that is subject to further discussions by the health authorities and those most directly involved. Such facilities are a model for constructive and open discussion.

Farnham hospital lies between North and Mid-Hampshire health authority and West Surrey health authority, and has faced particular difficulties. Over the years, local people have been keen to support the changes at Frimley. They had to accept the loss of Cambridge military hospital at Aldershot, and it is now Farnham's turn to resolve the outstanding uncertainty. I hope that the community health council will support the proposals when they are formally published for the three-month consultation period, so that action for a clear future can be resolved.

It is easy to speak about health authorities, trusts and community health councils behaving adversely, furtively and incompetently—the negative stories always outweigh the good ones—but in this instance I pay warm tribute to the community health council, to Nicholas Buchanan, to Dr. Shipp at the health forum, and to the hospital action team which is chaired by the local curate. Rather than being destructive, irresponsible and scaremongering, they have been determined to secure the outcome that they most wish. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), is also to have a new 24-bed community hospital at Fleet.

There are some outstanding issues. First, the new trust by which Farnham hospital will be managed seeks a new chairman. I hope that the merger of the trusts, which is currently the subject of consultation, will be approved, thus putting mental health services alongside community services.

In the context of the appointment of that chairman, I must voice the deep concern that has been expressed by many hon. Members over the reprehensible way in which the new Government have been handling health authority appointments. I have repeatedly asked the Secretary of State for Health for clarification, and have repeatedly raised with him the insult and offence that have been caused to people who for many years served the health service with great dedication and commitment. Sometimes they were not informed and did not know that they were not to be reappointed, until their successors telephoned them.

Ann Galbraith, a Newcastle trust chairman, represented the health service on the citizens charter panel. She did not know that she was not to be reappointed until her successor telephoned her. That is totally unacceptable. Angela Sealey, the chairman of North and Mid Hampshire health authority, who took forward the changes in Hampshire and incorporated the services from the Cambridge military hospital, has also not been reappointed.

Helen Gardiner, the chairman of Surrey ambulance service, came to an extremely troubled service that was suffering from a great deal of unrest and low morale, and turned it around. The service is now investing in the future, but she, too, has not been reappointed. There is deep alarm in both Frimley and Guildford that two exceptional chairmen—Alison Kinloch and Colston Herbert—may suffer from the same vengeful approach unless their colleagues raise the matter urgently.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): What a disgrace.

Mrs. Bottomley: I believe that it is a disgrace. When I was Secretary of State for Health, I was responsible for the appointment of Helene Hayman, Margaret Jay, Baroness Dean, Julia Neuberger and Baroness Thomas, because I was determined that people of all political parties, or of none, who were committed to the service should be appointed. They should be treated courteously; no one would think it right to be dismissed without proper thanks, appreciation or courtesy.

I ask the Leader of the House to ensure that, when making appointments in future, we rely on people of high public standing and calibre. My local trust will be difficult to manage: it contains six hospitals and is incorporating new services; and major redevelopments are in progress, such as the collaborations with GPs and social services. My anxiety is that, if we cannot treat those we appoint in a more civilised fashion, in future people of high calibre will not come forward to be involved in that vital public service.

The second concern I wish to express is about money. Last week's White Paper on the health service did not address resources. We suppose that the fundamental review will be on the Government's decision on whether pensioners are to pay prescription charges, and whether to introduce other measures that have been threatened. The sums simply do not add up: over the past 18 years, the average real-terms increase in health service funding has been 3 per cent., but the Labour Government are looking at half that rate of increase over two years.

The Government claim that they have put more money into the health service, but they do so by running two years together. That does not disguise the fact that,

each year, Governments put in more than was put in under the previous plan, which is business as usual; but it is not business as usual to have a mid-year cash injection. That may look good this year, but I can guarantee that the only result, next year and the year after, is that the health service will expect further injections. I fear that the Government may rue the day they made that decision. More serious is the lack of long-term resources to meet people's rising expectations, and to deliver the quality of care they should be able to expect.

In respect of my local community trust, there is deep concern about the vindictive settlement in the rate support grant for Surrey, which has had millions of pounds wiped away. I ask the Leader of the House to use her good offices to ensure that her colleagues receive delegations, because one aspect of what is becoming an increasingly high-handed and arrogant Government is Ministers' refusal to see delegations, except apparently by video conferencing. *[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) chuckles, but I assure him that, when I was a junior Environment Minister, I would not turn away delegations from anywhere in the country. The same was true when I was at the Department of Health. If Members of Parliament wanted to see a Minister, they were able to do so; they were not fobbed off by being told that they had to go to local government bodies or that the meeting would have to be video conferenced.

One of the obligations of being a Minister is to receive delegations, and I hope that the Leader of the House—especially in the context of an appalling settlement for Surrey, which is leading to extremely invidious choices having to be addressed—will ensure that delegations can see the Minister concerned and put their case.

There are some outstanding reservations about the Farnham proposals, which may be exacerbated by the outcome of the rate support grant settlement. The whole question of the 40 beds depends on a reduction in length of stay, an increase in bed occupancy and the development of intermediate care, which, in turn, closely depends on the availability of social services support, working in conjunction with community nurses and local GPs. The doubts that have been expressed about the preliminary proposals will be developed further if no satisfaction is obtained about the rate support grant.

Last week, the new White Paper on health was published. When one is looking to the future of the health service, one looks for

"a health service, not just an illness service—geared to improving health and preventing disease. A service focused on the individual patient, responding to their needs, listening to the public and influenced by their choices. An innovative service, evidence-based at every level and driven forward by education and training. An efficient service, which provides value for the taxpayers' money and offers individual choice. A service with a long-term view, working for the future, conditioned by the marathon rather than the sprint. A public service with a strong ethical foundation, funded mainly from taxation, accountable to the people and providing services for all."

Those words could easily have been found in the White Paper, but they did not appear there; nor did they appear in the White Paper I published a year ago, "A Service With Ambition", although they could have done. They are, in fact, words that I wrote two and a half years ago in speech entitled "The New NHS: Continuity and Change".

That only goes to show that the White Paper, instead of the dire predictions that Labour Members made when in opposition, is hauling up the white flag for the health service reforms. I am pleased that the Government endorse the purchaser-provider division. I welcome their emphasis on clinical effectiveness, but they will have to do more to invest in research and take forward the Culyer proposals if that is to carry any credibility. A telephone service staffed by nurses is a good idea, but it will not solve the problems of the health service—many GPs' out-of-hours arrangements already include such a facility. Making internet access available is a perfectly sensible, evolutionary idea, but it will not solve much, either.

Apart from the lack of resources and the expectations that will be seen in next year's public sector pay round, the interesting aspect of the White Paper is that the Government have bounced GPs into compulsorily becoming budget holders. I regard that as an amusing irony: had the previous Government forced the pace on GPs becoming budget holders, there might have been something of an outcry.

There is concern about how the groups of GPs will work together, as GPs tend to be individualistic. It will be important that the arrangements are not excessively bureaucratic, and that the light touch of GP fundholding, which could support innovation swiftly, is not undermined.

I believe that the evolutionary approach being taken by the Government will fit very well with the plans under way for the future of Farnham's community hospital for the 21st century. I wish it well, and commend it to the House.

10 am

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want first, to urge the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to conclude his investigation into the alleged perjury of Jonathan Aitken as quickly as possible; and secondly, to say a few words about the law relating to perjury.

Perjury is a very serious offence. In 1995, 193 people in England and Wales were convicted of perjury, of whom 94 were given immediate custodial sentences. The law prescribes that seven years is the maximum prison sentence for someone convicted of perjury, although the longest term imposed since 1979 is five years. The average sentence is just under four months.

What sort of people are convicted of perjury? There are those who lie to protect their reputations. For example, a magistrate ordered his wife to act like "a dumb blonde"—I am quoting a newspaper report—to protect his reputation after a car accident. He was sentenced to 15 months and his wife to nine months for perjury.

Earlier this year, a doctor failed to give life-saving treatment to a man with severe diabetes. He was convicted of lying at the inquest, and was gaoled for 12 months. In a recent case, a woman lied at a murder trial, which later collapsed. She was convicted of lying on oath, and was gaoled for 30 months. Only two months ago, at Knightsbridge crown court, Eddie Ashby, the right-hand man to Terry Venables, the former England soccer coach, was branded as a blatant perjurer, and was gaoled for four months.

If a person lies on oath in court, the penalties are very severe. It is an incontestable and irrefutable fact that the former Cabinet Minister, the former Minister for Defence Procurement—

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hesitate to intervene, but it is possible that charges may be laid against the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It is extremely difficult to see how he could reasonably expect a fair trial if the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) continues with the sort of allegations he is making.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The sub judice rule does not apply unless charges have been laid. The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) is responsible for what he is saying.

Mr. Hogg: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There needs to be some discretion. I agree that, strictly speaking, the sub judice rules do not apply, but, as I understand it, inquiries are afoot in the Metropolitan police. That raises the possibility that criminal charges are being contemplated. It would be very unfortunate if any trial were to be invalidated by anything that the hon. Member for Pendle might think fit to say under the cloak of privilege.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On many, many occasions over the years, Madam Speaker has advised us that hon. Members have to take responsibility for what they say in this Chamber. However, I ask you to imagine how it would seem to the outside world if an hon. Member used parliamentary privilege to pass a criminal conviction on someone what has not even been charged. Frankly, it does not do much for the reputation of this House or—not that this matters in the slightest—the reputation of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice).

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of what the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) have said, does it mean that the Tory party and Tory Members will make no reference to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), either today or any other day?

My recollection is that the Tories have, times without number, previously attacked Labour supporters who have been charged. Indeed, they did so last night over the hon. Member for Govan. The Tories want to be able to attack Labour Members, but, when a Labour Member attacks an ex-Tory Member, it is a different kettle of fish. Let us have fair play in this place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has not given the Chair the opportunity to ensure that fairness applies. We are governed by the sub judice rules of this House, and they have not been breached.

Mr. Prentice: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not wish or intend to behave irresponsibly.

The Jonathan Aitken libel action collapsed in June. It is now coming up to Christmas. I asked how much time had been spent by the Commissioner investigating the case, and was told last month that it was the equivalent of 39 man days. I do not want the investigation to drag on indefinitely. There is irrefutable proof in court transcripts that Jonathan Aitken lied under oath.

Jonathan Aitken was a Cabinet Minister. At one time, he was Minister for Defence Procurement. He was one of only two Members of Parliament in recent times to resign from the Privy Council. He brought the libel action against *The Guardian* and Granada Television. The "World in Action" documentary, "Jonathan of Arabia", detailed his history of arms dealing, and the fact that he was sponging off very rich Arabs.

The story is set out comprehensively in a book entitled, "The Liar", written by three journalists from *The Guardian*, Luke Harding, David Leigh and David Pallister. What upsets me about the whole case is that, when Jonathan Aitken went to court, he said that he was defending his reputation. He said that he would use

"the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of British fair play . . . to cut out the cancer of bent and twisted journalism."

To do that, Jonathan Aitken resigned from the Cabinet and as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He persuaded the then Prime Minister and many of his Conservative colleagues that he was a truthful individual. Against that background, had he won his libel action, he would have been awarded exemplary damages. I hate to think how much *The Guardian* and Granada Television would have had to pay out—probably hundreds of thousands of pounds.

In essence, the story is very simple. I will not rehearse it, other than to cite a few salient facts. When Jonathan Aitken was Minister for Defence Procurement, he stayed at the Ritz hotel in Paris, where he met Sayed Ayas, the business manager of Prince Mohammed, the son of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. *The Guardian* asked the simple question: "What was he doing there?" Correspondence started, innocently enough, between Peter Preston of *The Guardian* and Jonathan Aitken.

The contradictions in that correspondence began to show. For reasons that are known only to Jonathan Aitken, he alleged that the bill to settle the account at the Ritz hotel was paid by his wife Lolicia and not by Said Ayas. However, she was in Switzerland. In the libel action in June, irrefutable evidence was produced. The British Airways counterfoils for the journey of Lolicia and Jonathan Aitken's daughter Victoria from the United Kingdom to Switzerland proved that there was no possibility whatever of his wife dashing across to Paris to pay the bill.

That is the story. Jonathan Aitken lied on oath, like the magistrate who was sent to prison for 15 months, the friend of Terry Venables who was sent to prison for four months, and all the others that I have mentioned. They are all in it together. They are liars.

I take a simple view about these things. I am at one with Lord Denning, who said all those years ago:

"Be ye never so high, the law is above you."

I hope that the police are going to pass the papers to the Crown Prosecution Service just as soon as may be, so that the Aitken affair can finally be settled.

10.10 am

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The noble Lord Denning is a good and compassionate man. He is also one of the greatest jurists that this country

has produced. He would not have approved of what we have heard from the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). Jonathan Aitken is an old friend of mine. We all know that he has brought disrepute on himself and we deeply regret that fact, but we should not use the privilege of Parliament to stamp on the grave of a man who was once a distinguished Member. I deeply regret what I have heard.

I turn to another, although not wholly unrelated, matter: the way in which we treat Members of Parliament against whom allegations of serious misconduct have been made. I am glad that the Leader of the House is in her place, because I should like her to consider my suggestions.

The points that I want to raise relate to the procedures of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. What I say is against the background of the findings against Mr. Neil Hamilton, the former Member for Tatton, and the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). The procedures that we have in place do not sufficiently protect hon. Members against whom serious allegations have been made.

We need to be clear that a finding of serious misconduct against an hon. Member has the most serious consequences for that Member. Mr. Neil Hamilton lost his seat. His reputation has been wholly destroyed, and I imagine that he will find it extremely difficult to secure worthwhile employment in this country. In the case of the hon. Member for West Derby, the consequences were less grave, but his reputation has been seriously tarnished.

Those consequences were predictable and foreseeable. Because of that, it is important that the procedures that we put in place are sufficient to give hon. Members proper protection. Indeed, they should comply with the rules of natural justice. May I suggest in broad terms the nature of the procedures that we should put in place?

I think that it is clear that we should have a two-stage process: an inquiry with a right of appeal. As to the inquiry, I am content that we should proceed by way of a commissioner. That is a matter for the House, and I do not object to that, although I say in parenthesis that it would be a good thing if he were to sit with more than one other—preferably, it would be a panel of three. However, the rules of natural justice are not being complied with. May I summarise what the rules should be?

It is important that every hon. Member should know the nature of the charge that has been made against him or her. It is important, too, that the Member should have ample opportunity to defend himself or herself. Hon. Members should be represented by counsel, if that is their wish. The evidence against them should be given on oath. The evidence should be tested by cross-examination on behalf of the hon. Member—by counsel, for example—and the hon. Member should have the opportunity, through counsel, to make representations to the commissioner at the initial stage.

Those basic elements should exist, and, with the greatest respect to the House, to the Select Committee and to the commissioner, they did not exist in the case of Neil Hamilton.

I also believe that there should be a proper right of appeal, and that it should involve a rehearing, if necessary, of evidence. That did not happen in the case of Neil Hamilton; nor did it happen in the case of the hon. Member for West Derby. The latter asked to be heard by the Select Committee, I believe twice, and it denied him that request. In the case of Neil Hamilton, evidence was not given on oath before the Select Committee. Indeed, in effect, there was no evidence. Therefore, in respect of both men, there was no appeal.

Standing back, I can understand why hon. Members on both sides of the House might say to me, "You are putting an enormous infrastructure in place. Is it worth it?" I make two observations on that.

First, I ask for no more than the protection that is afforded to a person who appears before a magistrates court charged with a speeding offence. Every element that I have described applies to a person who is tried before a magistrates court for speeding. Evidence is given on oath, he knows the charges, there is the chance to cross-examine, he makes representations by counsel, and he can go to the Crown court for a complete rehearing. We are denying hon. Members the privileges, rights and protections that we give to the simplest citizen who is charged with the slightest offence.

We need to tackle the problem, because the injustice is great. I should like us fundamentally to change the procedures. I have already discussed briefly the principles that should apply at the initial stage—that is, in front of the commissioner. The House can work through the detail, and there will doubtless be various other models, but the principles are clear. However, I have come to the conclusion that the Select Committee cannot be the appellant body. There are several reasons for that.

Once we accept that there needs to be a rehearing, including the taking of evidence, we have to ask ourselves: has the Committee the time to do it? The answer is probably no. Almost every member of the Select Committee will know the person who is appealing to that body.

Moreover, most of us have been members of Select Committees, and we all bring to them our own prejudices and biases; we should not, but we do. Furthermore, in a place such as this, there are pressures of a private type—private chats in the Lobby, and the pressures that we all understand. Those should not play any part in what is a judicial process, yet they do. Therefore, I do not believe that the Select Committee can provide the sort of judicial solution—the judicial appeal—that hon. Members are entitled to expect. So what do we do?

Again, I do not want to say that I have a clear final view, but I have two suggestions. We can go down one of two roads. We can set up a specific committee that reports to the Select Committee and is composed of judicial figures—a panel of three or five persons who hold or have held high judicial office. In almost every case, the Select Committee would accept that report. Alternatively, it would have to give some jolly good reasons for not doing so. That committee of judicial figures would hear the evidence, listen to the submissions and constitute an appeal.

The alternative is to set up an ad hoc committee of senior Members of this House, and perhaps of another place, chaired by a former or current Law Lord, which would perform the same function and report to the House. There might be other models—I do not wish to be dogmatic—but I am certain that we must create a strueture that accords with the principles of natural justice and gives hon. Members the feeling that they can with confidence entrust their good name and reputation to the procedures that we have established.

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

Let us be clear about one thing: Members are destroyed by what happens at the moment, and we should not allow it to continue. I therefore ask the House to give urgent consideration to the my suggestions.

10.19 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) spoke about the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), who is sitting next to me, is a member. Over the years, there have been various Committees with various titles doing the same job—unsatisfactorily, in my view.

To some extent, I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the nature of Select Committees. By and large, they can and usually do reflect the political set-up in the House. When the House is evenly divided, as was almost the case in the last Parliament, many votes were six to five or five to four. Even in the most recent case, notwithstanding the great difference in the political make-up of the House, there were still divisions along what could be construed as party political lines.

I have never warmed to the idea of Select Committees. I do not accept the notion that we can all get together and be one happy family. When the chips are down and we have to deal with an important issue, hon. Members can bet their bottom dollar that the vote will separate along party lines. Frankly, matters affecting a Member's livelihood should be dealt with by an outside body.

The right hon. and learned Member suggested a committee of the great and the good. There was such a committee not too long ago—my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) used to sit on it, but he left because it would not meet in public. It is now time that these committees' functions were passed to an outside body, because in-house investigations—whether by Parliament, the stock exchange or the police—all end in disrepute. The sooner we take our investigations outside the House, the better.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). The fact is that my hon. Friend did not appear before the Committee and was not questioned by anyone. Someone said that that was a mistake, but that is what happened.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Member for West Derby made two requests to the Chairman to appear before the Committee to state his case, but those requests were denied.

Mr. Skinner: I heard someone say that that could have been a mistake, but my hon. Friend did not get a fair crack of the whip. I was present when he made his personal statement, and was astonished to learn that he did not have the opportunity to appear before the Committee. The sooner such matters are dealt with elsewhere, the better.

I want to speak about the plight of the coal industry and unemployment in areas where the pits have closed. We had a mini-debate a few weeks ago, but only a few hon. Members were able to speak. In the past few weeks, the Prime Minister and one or two others members of the Cabinet have tried to cobble together some kind of energy policy, bit by bit, but that is not satisfactory.

The industry is now very small compared to what it used to be. There are now a little more than 20 pits, producing under 50 million tonnes of coal a year. That pales into insignificance when compared with what we produced when I worked down the mines, when production was more than 200 million tonnes a year. The industry is now very small, but we must try to save what is left.

First, I must emphasise again that gas reserves are finite, and very small in relation to coal reserves. It is crazy to use gas in power stations when it could be saved for domestic use. I appeal to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to pass on the message that the control and use of gas should be part of any comprehensive energy policy.

Secondly, we have to deal with opencast mining. I heard Richard Budge complaining, whining and whingeing here the other week that he needed to cut the production of deep-mined coal because he could not sell enough to power stations. There was an element of truth in that, but he has the solution in his own hands. Of the 48 million or 49 million tonnes produced last year, 32 million came from deep mines, and about 16 million tonnes came from opencast mining. Richard Budge is responsible for that opencast production. If he wants to save the pits and the miners' jobs, all he has to do is stop opencasting, provide the necessary coal to the power stations, and thereby save the pits.

Once we have decided to use gas reserves in such a way that they will last for many years, the second message for my right hon. Friend to pass on is that we must change the planning controls—mineral planning guidance 3—in order to stop opencast developments in the old coalfield areas and at the same time preserve the jobs at the remaining 23 pits.

Thirdly, there has been much talk about beef and the fact that people on the continent are not doing the right thing by Britain. When I hear European experts talking about British beef, it gets up my nose. At the same time, the French are sending their electricity here, but we should not allow that to happen. Now is the time to act—just tell them. A comprehensive energy policy means curtailing the amount of electricity that is imported into this country from French nuclear power stations.

Fourthly, we are still giving massive subsidies to nuclear power stations. I hope that my right hon. Friend will deal with that.

Fifthly, we are importing coal. We have the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe—not in the world, because some slave labour economies such as Colombia and one or two others are cheaper. Polish, German, Spanish and Australian coal receives huge subsidies and some of it is coming on to our markets, affecting our jobs. Another element of any comprehensive energy policy would be the restriction of such imports.

I know that that will get up the nose of some people in the Common Market, but that does not worry me at all. I do not believe that the Common Market is going to be of any significant help to us. The halcyon days of the Common Market are over—yes, there was growth in the immediate post-war period, but there would have been growth, anyway.

Some people give the impression that, in order to live decently, we need to be subject to the Common Market's bidding, but that is nonsense. Let us put our cards on the table: if we want a comprehensive energy policy to save jobs in the coalfields, we are going to have to offend some of our so-called friends in the Common Market.

Having got that off my chest, I should like now, just briefly, to deal with the problems in the coalfield caused by the pit closures. I do not want to spend too much time attacking the previous Deputy Prime Minister and the rest of them, but those problems are a fact. There is no longer a single pit in my constituency, and there are absolutely none in Derbyshire, principally because of what happened in the past 18 years.

Unemployment in some pit villages—I ain't kidding—is over 30 per cent. In a few cases, it is over 40 per cent. It is true that not all those people are on unemployment benefit—as ex-miners, many of them get money from the Department of Energy under the agreements made when they were made redundant—but those unemployment rates are the truth of the matter.

The task force that has been set up, at my bidding, by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will have to think of the matter not as one of spreading the jam thinly over a massive area of Britain but as one of picking several little projects—target areas—in parts of the coalfields where unemployment is so high, and concentrating on producing a plan to reduce unemployment in the areas that have been hardest hit.

By and large, every pit was connected to rail. So we had 1,500 men going down a hole in the ground, and a railway line. The coal went down the railway line, and that was the sum total of the infrastructure. Now we have vast open spaces.

At Shirebrook, in my area, there are thousands of cleared acres that used to be mines, but now, apart from someone providing some work in the old pithead baths, there is only one chocolate factory. Why? Because there are no proper roads from pit villages. Anyone setting up a business in those areas, in many cases, would have to trundle through colliery estates to get to a motorway six or seven miles away. So there will have to be some infrastructure development to develop new forms of employment in areas of high unemployment.

If we can get that task force working in the manner that I have described—tightly targeted on areas where unemployment is so high—we can set an example, and repeat that example in other parts of Britain.

We should try something new to find employment for the disabled, too. Remploy factories are spread across Britain. A few years ago, when they closed one in the constituency next to mine, people came from all parts of Britain to march. Some people—50-odd of them—were in wheelchairs. Marchers came from Northern Ireland, from Newcastle and from all parts of Britain that have Remploy factories. It was a sight to see, because those people—many of whom were seriously disabled—were fighting for their jobs.

Such factories are a good idea, and we should be exploiting them. There is all this talk about welfare to work, so let us look at the matter from the work angle. I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to pass on a message to Cabinet members, when they have a few minutes: if they want to get disabled people into work—if they really mean it, if welfare to work is real—let us have a lot more Remploy factories, across Britain.

Unemployment will be a problem for the rest of this Parliament. I hear all the talk about big ideas, but, if we are to ensure that we resolve many of the problems at the end of five years, we will have to get people back into work. One of the chief accomplishments of our 1945 Government—when we had a massive majority of 196—was that we managed to build. We built a health service, a welfare state and houses for every local authority. We also rebuilt Britain, almost from the ashes.

How did we do it? We certainly did not have any money, because the country was skint after the second world war. It was done, first, through political will, and, secondly, by the fact that everyone had a job. Everyone was pulling their weight and paying taxes and national insurance. Today, we still have an army—if the figures were counted correctly—of well over 3 million unemployed. Employment is the key to solving most of the problems we face today.

I hope that my right hon. Friend has taken down all those points in fine detail, so that they can be passed to the respective Cabinet members, and we can deal with the issues of developing an energy policy and getting rid of mass unemployment.

10.34 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me a chance to speak in this debate, and also for the clarification that you gave me when I was sworn in, that I would not be required to make a second maiden speech—sparing me the embarrassment of having to praise my predecessor, who was me.

The points that I should like to make to the Leader of the House relate specifically to the experiences that I have had in fighting two elections this year, and in facing a court case and election petitions. The issues may seem trivial, but, after I have expressed my concerns, anyone who has stood in an election will realise that there are some very serious problems with the current election system.

We must ensure that we preserve the bedrock of our democracy. To do so, voters will have to be sure that our way of running elections is fair, sensible and practical. The public must have confidence that we have such a system. Unfortunately, this year's experience for me and the voters of Winchester suggests that we do not. I ask the Leader of the House to assure me that she will recommend to those in the relevant Departments that they should conduct a fundamental examination of some of the issues that I will raise.

The first issue is that of rogue candidates. I am pleased that the Government seem already to be taking the issue very seriously. Hon. Members from both sides of the House—even Madam Speaker herself—have faced that problem, which was particularly acute in Winchester. In the general election, we had the interference of a candidate who stood as a "Liberal Democrat—Top choice for Parliament". He secured 640 votes, whereas I won by only two votes. All hon. Members will realise that that candidate's interference caused mayhem, and that the subsequent Winchester by-election can be attributed largely to him.

I know that Ministers are examining the matter of the labelling of individual candidates. It is essential that the process moves speedily—so that such candidates cannot stand in a misleading form in the European elections, and certainly not in the next general election.

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

The specific point that I should like to raise, however, deals with an initial inability to object to the nomination of such candidates. In Winchester, when that "Liberal Democrat—Top choice for Parliament" candidate submitted his nomination, we were told that we had only two hours to object to it. That meant that—literally in two hours—my wife, agents and I had to dash round trying to track down the 10 individuals who had nominated him. Imagine my horror when I discovered, after we tracked down five of them, that my posters were up in the gardens of three of their homes, expressing their desire to vote for me.

We went into those people's houses, spoke to them and asked, "Why have you nominated someone else for this election?" They expressed their concern, and an immediate desire to undo their nomination of entirely the wrong person. We were able to persuade them to visit the returning officer, and marched them in to do so. With an hour left to object, those people were prepared to swear affidavits in front of the returning officer, saying that they had been completely tricked into signing the wrong candidate's nomination paper; that they wished to undo that; and that they wished to support the candidate whose posters were up in their gardens.

I was horrified to realise that the returning officer had absolutely no power to refuse the nomination, and that those people had to live with nominating a candidate whom they did not wish to nominate. I should like that situation to be examined, because returning officers have to have greater powers to query nomination papers when individuals say clearly that they were tricked into signing them.

I also believe that we have to examine the time available to object to questionable nominations. It was very difficult to dash round Winchester, trying to track down the nominating individuals. Two hours is simply not sufficient to complete the process properly. In addition, 24 hours is not enough time for the courts to listen to the various arguments relating to the description of candidates. The matter needs urgent attention.

My concerns then moved on to the way in which the election in Winchester was run—the count itself. There certainly seemed to be grave difficulties in dealing with two elections on one day. There were problems for the polling staff in each of the polling stations. The count was the longest in history, with the result not finally declared until 6 pm the following Friday. That was stressful for the candidates, the clerks and everyone involved.

The reasons were connected with the problem of having two elections on the same day and individuals putting ballot papers into several boxes, which at times were overflowing. Frankly, the system could not cope with the number of people who wanted to vote on two extremely long ballot forms at the same time. If we are to continue to have dual elections, we must re-examine how they are managed and run.

The position went from bad to worse. Within half an hour of my being declared the winner, there were rumours that an election petition would be brought against me. I wish to draw to the attention of the Leader of the House my concerns about the way in which election petitions operate. I shall spare the House the intricacies of the system. If "Mastermind" were still running, it would be my specialist subject. However, the House needs to know that the way in which election petitions operate is extremely unfair to Members and petitioners. The time scale involved needs examining.

It seems to be fundamentally wrong that I was able to be sworn in, take my seat, make a maiden speech and act as the constituency Member with the uncertainty of an election petition hanging over me for almost six months. It does not seem proper than any hon. Member should have to be put in that position.

I understand that other countries deal with such disputes much more effectively. In the French general election, a similar petition was brought on similar grounds, but the matter was resolved within 48 hours—before anyone had taken the seat. The process here takes a wholly inappropriate length of time, and the uncertainty hanging over me and the individual who took that action against me was unacceptable.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that he should not have taken his seat until the matter had been resolved?

Mr. Oaten: If there had been a quicker process by which election petitions could be dealt with, and it was clear to hon. Members who had petitions against them that the matter would be resolved within a week or even 48 hours, I certainly would not have taken my seat. When I found out that the petition was pending against me, I had doubts about taking my seat, and even considered resigning to try to bring the matter to a head more quickly. It may interest the House to know that an hon. Member cannot resign until 21 days after a general election—as I discovered when I looked into that option.

The law needs clarification in respect of the way in which election petitions operate. At the time, there were major concerns among lawyers on both sides who were desperately trying to interpret the law. I urge the Leader of the House to consider the points that I have raised.

One aspect of the petition against me was the basis on which it was brought. It revolved around the fact that the ballot papers had not been franked, and that, if they had been franked, it might have changed the result.

Why do we frank ballot papers in the first place? I understood that it was to ensure that no fraud or corruption could take place. However, it was assumed in the petition drawn up against me and the subsequent court cases that, although papers had not been franked, fraud and corruption had not taken place, and they were allowed to be included and to change the result.

We need to review how we judge unfranked papers and the system of perforation. Why do we do it? Is it a foolproof system? Hon. Members may be amused or alarmed to hear that, after all the publicity about the franking of election papers, during the re-run in Winchester one of the perforation stamping machines broke down, and the presiding officer in the village hall had to raid the kitchen for some forks which were then used to make the official mark on the ballot papers. It is a farce, and it needs urgent review.

We also need to look at the way in which we use the electoral roll in elections. The re-run in Winchester took place some 18 months after people had originally completed their forms to be included on the electoral roll.

As a result, a large number of people in the constituency felt disfranchised. They could not vote in the election, although some had lived in the area for almost two years.

People who had completed new forms for inclusion on the roll in October were extremely confused by the fact that they had no right to vote in the by-election in November. Surely it cannot be beyond technology to have a rolling register that would be more up to date. After all, we collect the council tax pretty quickly. Individuals certainly do not have to wait two years before having to pay. Why cannot our electoral roll be updated along the same lines? It would seem a simple thing to do, and it would help to reduce the number of people who, feeling disfranchised, then try to vote illegally.

Another cause of disfranchisement is the time scale for applications of postal and proxy votes. People often complain about the short notice given for applying for postal votes—often about a week after an election is called. That does not give people enough time to organise postal votes. Again, I call on the Leader of the House to look at the current deadlines for organising postal and proxy votes.

My final concern is personation at polling stations. Hon. Members may be aware that, in Winchester, there were two proven cases of personation, although I believe that there were many more. There were probably personations in every constituency. Only when the majority is just two votes do such matters become critical and come to light. The implications were that individuals went to cast votes when they had no legal entitlement to do so.

I am concerned that polling clerks have no powers to refuse individuals the right to vote. In Winchester, a polling clerk recognised someone who requested a ballot paper in someone else's name. However, that polling clerk had no power to prevent that individual from voting.

It leads to the ridiculous situation where, for example, I could walk into the Prime Minister's constituency, say that I was the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and vote as the right hon. Member for Sedgefield if he had not already done so. It is my understanding that the presiding officer or clerk would have no power to prevent me from doing that, if I continued to insist that I was the right hon. Member for Sedgefield and wanted to vote. I urge the Leader of the House to look at that aspect of electoral law.

In conclusion, it is now time to look at the fundamental matters of rogue candidates; the power to challenge nominations; whether we should include perforations on ballot papers, and, if we do, their ability to change their results; the possibility of having a rolling electoral roll; the timing and speeding up of election petitions; the working practices of joint elections; and the problem of personation. The Government need to review all those issues.

I am grateful to the people of Winchester that the story had a happy ending for me. Nevertheless, I remain committed to the principle that we need to look at the entire election process. My personal experience suggests that it is not as robust and healthy as it needs to be for the future of our democracy.

10.47 am

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): After the speech by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), I should like to change the subject altogether. My concern is the compensation regulations that apply to individuals, home owners and businesses affected by major infrastructure schemes—particularly major road schemes.

I raise the issue at this historic moment because nearing completion through the heart of my constituency is one of the most expensive, and certainly one of the most complicated, urban motorway schemes in the country, which was initiated by the previous Government with the best intentions.

As a result, I embarked, like the hon. Member for Winchester—although circumstances were different—on an extremely rapid learning curve. Given that the scheme goes through a highly congested urban area, many hundreds of businesses and properties were affected. My constituents who were affected very quickly realised that the regulations are outdated and anomalous, and that they leave those concerned with a deep sense of injustice.

Why are the regulations outdated? In the main, the regulations that cover compensation and other relevant matters concerning road schemes were established during the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. As far as I can gather, the most recent such regulations were made in 1973. So review of regulations that directly affect individuals is long overdue—if for no other reason than the fact that the gap between the regulations being made and today is more than 20 years. Circumstances have changed considerably over that time.

The fact that the regulations are outdated is not the most important point that I want to make in this regard. Why are the regulations anomalous? I shall give one or two examples from the experiences of my constituents over the past three and a half years.

The road scheme to which I have referred is coming to a conclusion, but the first phase of it began almost four years ago. We are not talking about amending a road junction or some relatively minor scheme that may take a few weeks or a few months. We are talking about a scheme that was decided by the Government and which affects the lives of individuals and businesses over at least four years. Of course, when the road is finished, the contractors will pick up the mess and take their tools and plans away, and that will be the end of it as far as they are concerned. It is certainly not the end of it for those who have been affected.

If a business or a home owner is directly affected by the scheme, the authorities have a duty to submit a compulsory purchase order. That in itself is a complicated process—although in my experience, it can be relatively simple. It is when one comes to consider either compulsory or discretionary purchase, which is available to the authorities, that one begins to see the problems that individuals and particularly businesses experience. For example, under the regulations, there is no provision for any compensation for loss of business, even if the business is directly or indirectly affected by such a road scheme. A number of examples illustrate that point.

Imagine that a family—mother, father and grandparents beforehand—have been in business for generations when along come the Government and say, "We wish to build a road through this area, and it will affect your business directly. We have provision for compulsory purchase of your property and, subject to certain procedures, that may work out reasonably successfully. You may want to wind up the business, but you could be relocated, which is a difficult process."

[Mr. George Stevenson]

There is no provision whatever for loss of business. It does not matter whether compulsory or discretionary purchase orders are used: there is no right under the regulations to business or trade, even though a business may have been trading for generations. That is extremely serious, and certainly an injustice with which the House ought to be concerned.

Many businesses in my constituency have had to employ professional people to act on their behalf, which is right and proper, although, when they look into possible compensation, they are told bluntly and starkly that it does not matter what effect the road scheme has had, because there is no provision in compensation regulations for loss of business. I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, will take particular note of that, and ensure that the relevant Ministers are made aware of it.

What happens if one is a householder whose house is not directly in the line of the proposed road? If it is within 100 m of the centre of the proposed road, one may apply for what is called discretionary blight. But my goodness, one has to jump through some very important hoops before one gets anywhere near receiving compensation under that provision. I shall give the House just two examples to underline that.

If one applies for discretionary blight, one has to satisfy what are called the McCarthy rules. If we think back to the early 1950s, we could draw some perverse comparisons. I will not detain the House with details of how the McCarthy rules came to be. I shall simply refer to two aspects of them.

The first is the principle of prior knowledge. What does that mean? If someone bought a property in the prior knowledge that the road was to be built, they would have no right to compensation. What do we mean by prior knowledge? In the case of my constituency, it meant from the day that the Department of Transport drew a red pencil line on the map. So, if someone bought a property within 100 m of that line after the public inquiry, and so on, they would have no right to compensation under discretionary blight provisions, because they had prior knowledge.

What is not available at that time—nor can it be—is information on the array of side road orders, amendments to plans, closures of roads during construction, and so on. People sometimes have to wait years before details of the scheme become available.

In the case of the road in my constituency, the line was put on the map in 1986, but it was not until early 1990 that details became available. During that time, people may have bought properties. They will not receive compensation because they had prior knowledge—although they had no prior knowledge whatever of the road closures and the direct effect on their property. Therefore, they receive no compensation.

I recognise that we have to have rules and regulations to govern the important issue of compensation. However, it is unacceptable that a line can be drawn on a map and, years later—in this case, five or six years later—details of the road and the effect it will have on the side roads are still not available. People whose homes are affected receive no compensation, because they are deemed to have prior knowledge. They had some prior knowledge, but they did not have the detailed prior knowledge that would have enabled them to make a proper judgment.

Even people who are able to show that they meet the McCarthy rules on discretionary blight face the problem of market value. The district valuer in Stoke-on-Trent has often told me that it is his job to determine market value having no regard for the fact that a road is to be built. With the best will in the world, the system does not work like that, because, the moment that a road scheme is identified—even only in general terms—the value of the neighbouring properties goes down. It does not matter how well intentioned the district valuer is, because he cannot manufacture an artificial market value, and he would be wrong to do so.

The reality is that people who claim discretionary blight—like scores of my constituents—go through the hoops set up by the McCarthy rules; the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions accepts the blight notice and the need to pay compensation, but, when the district valuer sets the market valuation, people are appalled that the value of the property that they have lived in for years is reduced by half. I have personal experience of that happening to my constituents.

The district valuer says in answer to representations that he has set the current market value, and he can do no other. That is a serious anomaly, so I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take notice of those stark examples of how outdated the regulations are. They leave people—who, through no fault of their own, have their properties and businesses jeopardised by major infrastructure schemes—with a real sense of injustice. An urgent and detailed examination of the working of the regulations is long overdue. We should modernise them, and remove the chronic injustices they cause.

11.3 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess, I wish to make several brief points, but, before doing so I shall first touch on the speech of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), to whose remarks Opposition Members listened carefully. He has a right to be pleased by his election victory. No doubt the Liberal council in Winchester will put in order some of the difficulties that he articulated. My election in Southend, West was less than satisfactory in certain respects. The campaign started with the Liberal candidate sending me a postcard saying that the Liberals did not want any part in a Punch and Judy show. However, for the four weeks of the campaign, we had a big Punch and Judy show from them.

My result was declared at about 6 am in the midst of a farcical situation. Everyone was very tired because they had been separating the county ballot papers from the general election ballot papers. I was asked if I would allow my vote to be reduced by 120 so that everyone could go home. I said that I was being asked to behave like a gentleman and we all shook hands, but one of the other parties made a fuss and wanted to go through the ballot papers. I could have been difficult and asked for a further count—I probably would have got even more votes. I understand that the hon. Member for Winchester feels hard done by, but he is not alone in experiencing difficulties at counts.

The first matter that I wish to raise is the Kyoto conference. I am very pro-American, but I am a little sick of being lectured from across the Atlantic. The conference was farcical. The European Union commitment was to

reduce emissions by 8 per cent. on the 1990 level by 2010. It is crazy that the Americans, the most powerful nation in the world, will not agree to that target. The underdeveloped countries, which are in the majority, also have not agreed any targets. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned energy policy, but the situation becomes even more farcical when we realise that the Government are adopting a higher target than the European Union has agreed. Yesterday, I visited the Dunton emissions plant for the celebration of its 40th anniversary, and I know that the Minister also hoped to be present. At that meeting, the chairman of Ford worldwide expressed his concern about the issue of emissions, and we should listen carefully to what he had to say about the consequences for the United Kingdom.

My second point is about vitamin B6. I knew very little about the subject until constituents started to write to me, but some 3 million people use that product and it gives comfort to any number of sufferers, although I shall not dwell on that point. The way that the issue has been handled since July is extraordinary. Unfortunately, we read most Government announcements in the newspapers these days. I am sure that the Minister will say that he will not take any lectures from the Conservative party—although we have a new Government and new Labour is walking on water so they will not wish to refer to what happened in the past. I understand that six hon. Members have made representations to the relevant Minister. Has there has been any movement on vitamin B6, because several of my constituents are upset about it?

My third point concerns the Palace theatre in Westcliff. There is a legitimate debate about the funding of the arts and not all my constituents would agree that the arts should take priority over health and education. However, given that it is generally accepted that a certain proportion of the national cake goes to the arts, my constituents want a fair share of the money from the Eastern area arts board. The present situation is unfair. At the moment, the Palace theatre in Westcliff—a magnificent theatre—gets £45,000; Watford gets £204,500; Colchester gets £230,000; and Ipswich gets £322,750. I recently met the chief executive and other representatives of the board and I told them that the share for the Palace theatre was ridiculous. Southend council is the second biggest net contributor to the board, but it gets a poor allocation of resources. It was clear that the chief executive was softening me up so that next year we would get nothing. That is not satisfactory. The Minister for Arts knows how strongly I feel on this issue, and I intend to take every opportunity to make sure that the wonderful theatre in Westcliff receives a fair share of the moneys available.

The next matter to which I wish to refer is Cyprus. Together with other hon. Members, I had the opportunity this year to visit Cyprus, where I first visited Famagusta. We are broadly speaking in agreement in the House that the situation in Cyprus is a tragedy. I understand that the Deputy Prime Minister said at the Labour party conference that we were into new territory, and that he and the Prime Minister took Cyprus very seriously and would ensure that something was done.

The meeting between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash was unsatisfactory. President Clerides's view was that the Greek Cypriots were committed to a just and long-lasting solution in a bizonal, bicommunal federation accepted by both sides in 1977 and 1979 in high-level agreements, while the solution preserves the integrity of Cyprus as one sovereign and one international personality. To achieve a just and long-lasting solution, the Greek Cypriots believe that the security aspects should be addressed and that a satisfactory solution to the problem of the displaced should be found, while human rights and basic freedoms are safeguarded in accordance with the acquis communautaire and other international instruments of human rights.

During my two visits, I saw that there was a great fear among the Greek Cypriots about the intentions of the Turkish Government. It is so easy to forget about the situation in Cyprus. The UK is one of the three guarantors and, as a Christmas present, the House should unite in an effort to ensure that Cyprus is united.

The final point I wish to raise is the very serious matter of suicide. A huge number of people in this country commit suicide. Every day of the week, one will read in the newspapers that someone has committed suicide. Many of us who travel on the tube find that it is disrupted and we all curse and blind, until we find that someone has thrown himself on the track. The same is true of British Rail. We can think of the recent suicides of children who have been bullied at school. So many people under different circumstances commit suicide.

In my time in this House, Jocelyn Cadbury—a former Member for Birmingham, Northfield—and then John Heddle have committed suicide. Two of the Members who have taken part in today's debate—the hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg)—were present when we had an all-night sitting on gun law. Because the hon. Member for Bolsover legitimately used the procedures of this House, we stayed in our places rather than constantly dividing. I was next to John Heddle during that all-night sitting and I felt that I got to know him far better than I had done before. I was horrified when he committed suicide a few days later. We have also had the recent, tragic case of Gordon McMaster.

Last year's figures showed that we had the lowest number of suicides this century, but many people in our constituencies are so disturbed and upset that they may be considering suicide. I represent the 31st out of 659 constituencies in terms of the number of constituents who are senior citizens. Many will be spending Christmas on their own, and I simply make a plea. When we enter the millennium, rather than 3,500 people in this country committing suicide each year—with the tragedy that that brings to our lives—it would be a mark of this country's value and civilisation if there were a drastic reduction in the number of suicides. In the milk of human kindness, I hope that all hon. Members—I know that they will—will ensure that all their constituents get help and support not only over Christmas, but in the years that lie ahead.

11.14 am

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): First, I apologise for the fact that I was not in the Chamber for the earlier speeches and for the fact that I am unable to stay for the rest of the debate, because I am serving on the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill Committee, to which I must return.

Owing to the pressure of numbers contributing to the debate on the report of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, neither of those who dissented from the

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

Committee's report was able to be heard. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to bring to the House my concerns about the way in which self-regulation is operating—or, as I would contend, failing to operate—in this important area. It is an important area because if we cannot regulate ourselves in a way that commands confidence, both in the House and among the public at large, we certainly cannot aspire to regulate others.

I believe that the report into the investigation of Neil Hamilton was a travesty—a travesty of natural justice, and the result of a deplorable shambles. It is urgent that we put together proper procedures in the House so we never have that sort of a shambles again. There was general agreement among Members of all parties that evening during the debate that the procedures were inadequate.

First, let me say that I do not criticise the thoroughness with which Sir Gordon Downey carried out his investigation; it would be quite wrong to do so. The report involved the detailed amassing of highly complex evidence, and reports that there was a falling out between Sir Gordon Downey and the Committee are very much exaggerated. I pay tribute to the report that he produced. Nor am I necessarily convinced that Mr. Hamilton was innocent of the main charge—taking cash in brown envelopes for questions from Mohammed Al Fayed. My disquiet over the report has nothing to do with any view that Mr. Hamilton might be innocent. It is straightforwardly that I do not believe I can make a judgment as to whether he was innocent or guilty on the basis of the procedures that were adopted.

It is disturbing that the House, which should set an example of justice and fair dealing, was presented with a report against which Mr. Hamilton—or anybody else in such a situation; this is not special pleading for Mr. Hamilton—had no appeal. It is a basic tenet of British justice that there can be an appeal against a guilty verdict. We assume the verdict was guilty because it was indicative of the shambles which occurred that no two members of the Committee were able to agree on what the report was telling the House.

The Chairman said that Sir Gordon's findings stood, which meant that the verdict was guilty; but the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) told the House that there was no clear verdict, so it was not proven, which was also my understanding of our conclusion. That is why we removed one set of words, saying that we endorsed the findings, and substituted another, saying that we could find no practical way of adding to or subtracting from them. The House was entitled to a clear statement of what we had found, rather than several confused versions from different members of the Committee.

Throughout our proceeding, we were bedevilled by the fact that there were no clear, agreed procedures. I had never before sat on a Committee in which we made up our procedures as we went along, but that is exactly what happened. We could not agree on what our remit was or what our procedures should be. We ended by reducing justice to the decision of a single inquisitor, against which there was no effective appeal.

It was farcical that, when Mr. Hamilton appeared before us and talked at us—I cannot think of any other way of expressing it—for nearly two and a half hours, we were not allowed to ask any questions. If we thought that he had contradicted himself or that something was unclear, we could not ask about it; we had to sit there in silence and absorb the onslaught—that is what it was—for two and a half hours. That is profoundly unsatisfactory. At the end, I was none the wiser. I had heard a great deal that had raised an awful lot of questions in my mind, but, because I could not ask questions, I was neither wiser nor better informed.

We could not examine the main witnesses against Mr. Hamilton. Mr. Al Fayed was not called before the Committee, and we could not examine those who said that they had been involved in the dispatch of the money, so we had no basis on which to assess a report that had been challenged. That was our real problem, because there were no serious challenges to the facts in all the other reports before us; there were pleas in mitigation, writings to the Committee to apologise and drawings of our attention to other matters, but there was no real challenge to facts. On the occasion when there was an extremely serious challenge to facts we did not have the procedures to deal with it.

We examined Sir Gordon Downey's huge and extremely thorough report and we knew that it would take a very long time, involve a great deal of complexity, and demand resources that we possibly did not have, to re-examine the questions from scratch. The answer to that was not to shrug our shoulders and have done with it, but to come back to the House and say that we were stuck and needed a clear remit and guidance on how we should proceed.

We have to decide whether the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is an appellate body. Should it hear appeals against the Commissioner's findings? If not, who is to hear such appeals; or are we seriously suggesting that we should create in the House a situation, unique in this country, in which a finding can blight someone's career prospects, and even preclude membership of the House, but no appeal is possible? Surely that must be unacceptable.

We have to decide what appeal there should be. Should it be heard by the Committee or by some other body? Should practising lawyers be involved? What should we do? Is the Committee simply a sentencing and administrative body, or is it an investigative body that determines guilt and innocence? Those questions, incredibly, have not been sorted out. We carried out investigations—if that is the right word—into the conduct of Members of Parliament, without an answer to the basic question: what is the purpose of the Committee?

The purpose of the Committee determines very much what its composition should be. I regret the fact that it has been downgraded in composition. A Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, sitting in judgment on Members of Parliament, and occasionally quite senior ones, should itself be a senior Committee. I regret the fact that the Leader of the House does not chair it. The Committee's predecessor was chaired by the then Leader of the House, and back in the mists of time it was chaired by the Prime Minister. That gave the Committee real gravitas, which I believe is now lacking.

I do not want to criticise new Members, as those who serve on the Committee are extremely diligent and intelligent, and spend a lot of time examining the evidence, but they lack one huge dimension: experience.

Experience counts in such investigations, as it helps one to understand what a Member of Parliament could or could not be expected to know. One needs to have served in the House before one can reach such judgments. The composition of the Committee is all wrong.

We need to ask ourselves whether legal representation should be allowed. In highly complex investigations of the sort that went on in the Hamilton case, we should consider seriously whether we should allow cross-examination of witnesses. It is worth pointing out that in this case Mr. Hamilton was not allowed to cross-examine the witnesses against him, even in front of Sir Gordon Downey, never mind in front of the Committee. That seems to me to be another affront to justice, and even to natural justice.

I do not say that there are easy answers. I am not standing here sanctimoniously saying that we should have had it all sorted out, although we should have had a lot more sorted out than we did; but the solution that the Committee should have arrived at was to say honestly to the House that, within our current remit, against procedures of which we were not even certain, we really needed clearer instructions before we could proceed. As it is, we have left a man—who may be guilty; I do not presume innocence—with no clear verdict and no right of appeal. That should bring us deep shame.

It is urgently necessary that the House address itself to what it expects the Committee to do, what composition it should have, and how we are to resolve the situation. It will be fine as long as we carry on having simple cases, but the next time that we get one of the complexity of the Hamilton case, we will be back in exactly the same situation if we have not sorted out our procedures.

I resigned from the Committee because I could not go on wading against a sea of uncertain procedures, with no clear remit, making things up as we went along and, in the end, having to subscribe to a report that, I believe, brought shame on us, not because we had not made honest efforts but because we had not been able to sort out the mess. It ill behoves any Select Committee to return a shambles to the House.

Of course I understand the convention by which both Government and Opposition accept reports from Select Committees, especially when they concern standards and privileges and the regulation of our own conduct; but on this occasion I believe that they should not have accepted the report: it should have been sent back to the Committee for reconsideration. It was accepted, however, and the damage is done; whether justly or unjustly, we will never know, because there is no appeal. We must get this sorted out for the future. If we cannot regulate ourselves we have absolutely no right to aspire to regulate anybody else.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If everyone who wishes to catch my eye is to succeed in doing so, brevity is essential. I call Mr. Andrew Love.

11.28 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for not informing you earlier that I wanted to contribute to this debate.

After what we might call the wide-ranging contribution from the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), I am sorry that I did not bring along a few more of my constituency issues; but I crave the indulgence of the House for a moment as I echo and support what my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) said.

I, too, have a major road scheme in my constituency. It is an extension to the north circular road which cuts in two a small shopping centre. I was approached by some of the traders in that shopping centre and I investigated the situation. I discovered that traders have no right in law to passing trade. It does not matter if they have had regular customers for years and can prove it; they have no right in law. In any scheme of that nature, where car-borne customers are cut off, traders have no recourse to compensation.

I want to reinforce and support the idea that this issue should be examined. Road schemes, especially in urban areas, by their very nature have an impact on the local community and local traders. It is incumbent on us to look closely at what we can do to mitigate the effects while the scheme is being undertaken.

This morning's debate gives me an opportunity to raise the issue of the future of the building societies movement. In the light of earlier contributions, perhaps I should declare an interest—it is not and does not have to be in the Register of Members' Interests—in that I am the chairman of the all-party building societies group in the House.

The thrust of my remarks is that building societies are under threat and that much of the strength of the financial services sector in this country will be undermined if they disappear. Some people will express concern that I should view their future in such stark terms because, after all, the Nationwide successfully fought off an attempt to undermine its mutual status and the Government recently raised the threshold required in any ballot to demutualise, recognising the situation. Both are true and I welcome them.

My concern relates to the failure of the Building Societies Act 1997—it was passed under the previous Government—to provide any safeguard for societies against the activities of carpetbaggers or the impact that that is having on building societies and whether, as a result, their mutuality will be perceived as a hindrance to their future success. Before considering that, I shall talk about the value that mutual organisations bring to the financial services sector.

The consumer benefits from access to the services and products provided by mutual organisations. In other words, building societies offer choice to the consumer and they are popular. Although the remaining societies have only about 25 per cent. of the mortgage market, over the past three months they have lent more to their customers than all the banks combined. Survey after survey confirms that building societies have come top in customer service and friendliness. They provide diversity in their different structures and different objectives. For example, mutuals are able to take a longer-term perspective as they are not driven by the need continually boost to their share prices or to maximise dividends to shareholders.

Many societies are regionally or even locally based which brings them closer to their customers. Many play a significant role in their local communities. I am sure that hon. Members up and down the country would echo that. Building societies provide stability in the market—not for them the false attractions of property speculation or

[Mr. Andrew Love]

secondary banking. As a result, no savings have been lost in building societies this century. They are truly prudential organisations.

Most importantly, building societies provide competition to the banks and other institutions in the financial services sector. That is because mutual organisations do not have to pay dividends to external shareholders. As a result, building societies have a margin advantage that allows them to offer cheaper mortgages, or savings accounts which, on average, pay more. Most societies have decided to combine the two. That was most graphically illustrated by the announcement yesterday that the Nationwide was pledged not to raise its main mortgage rate in response to last month's base rate increase. That has opened up a record 0.6 per cent. gap with its main demutualised rivals. The Nationwide has also reaffirmed its pledge to maintain, and even to increase, its savings rate. That will maintain the significant margin advantage that currently exists between the mutual and non-mutual sectors.

In a recent survey, the Consumers Association compared a range of core products—savings accounts, tax exempt special savings accounts, mortgages and overdrafts—and found that consumers would have been nearly £1,600 better off over five years with a building society than with a bank. Without that competitive restraint in the market, it is likely that the banks would widen the margins between their mortgage and savings rates. That has already been shown in research carried out by the Consumers Association.

The building societies sector has been undergoing rapid change in the past few years and that has culminated in the conversion of five of the largest societies this year. However, that still leaves 70 societies with assets in excess of £130 billion. The recent windfall gains to members have created a climate that threatens the very mutuality of those remaining societies.

In that context, I again congratulate the Nationwide on the magnificent campaign that it fought earlier this year. A group of five so-called "members for conversion" stood for election solely on a ticket of demutualisation, in the teeth of opposition from the board, the staff and, as it turned out, the members of the society. At the height of that campaign about 25,000 accounts were being opened daily, swamping the society and making it difficult, if not impossible, to carry out its ordinary business for its main customers. As a result—this is according to the society's management—the level of service it provided fell below an acceptable level.

The Nationwide came through that with flying colours and, fortunately, its members voted in favour of their long-term interests rather than for short-term gain. I do not conclude that that spells the end of the carpetbaggers. I should like to think that that would be so, but I find it difficult. There is growing evidence that others are coming forward to take up the challenge to demutualise.

Although the next annual general meeting of the Nationwide does not take place until April, it is already clear from public statements that at least nine candidates, some who have stood previously and some new candidates, are committed to "members for conversion" and will be standing for election, regardless of the overwhelming result earlier this year.

It is clear that societies, which have to survive in a cut-throat, competitive market, simply cannot continue to be diverted from their core business activities to defend their mutual status. If the attacks continue, even if unsuccessful, societies are likely to be faced with the unpalatable choice of continuing to defend their position against increasing odds or accepting that it would be better for the business and for their other stakeholders to convert on their own terms. That would reduce the number of societies below the level that would make that sector sustainable and would, inevitably, lead to its elimination from the financial services market.

I shall now turn to an argument put most cogently by Professor David Llewellyn of Loughborough university. He said that there is a systemic interest in maintaining mutuality, not because it is somehow an inherently superior form of ownership, but because there is a need for a mixed ownership structure in the financial services sector. If that is accepted, mutuality becomes a public policy issue, and Government, and especially Parliament, must take an interest in ensuring that the consumer does not lose out from continued conversions. How can that be done?

The Minister has already shown the way by raising the threshold for conversion to 50 per cent. It must be right that fundamental decisions about the future of building societies should require at least that level of support before demutualisation can happen. After all, converted societies can be taken over only if 75 per cent. of shareholders vote to confirm such action.

For large mutual societies, the number of people required to nominate candidates for election should be raised above the current maximum of 50. As recent events have shown, that maximum can easily be exploited by a small band of eccentric or dissident individuals. Let us compare what happens in building societies with what happens in general elections, on which the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) commented earlier. A Member of the House must be nominated by 10 electors in an average constituency of 67,000. That is one for every 6,700. The Nationwide, the largest mutual society, has 7 million members; the Bradford and Bingley, the second largest, 2.2 million. For the Nationwide, one nomination per 140,000 members is needed; for the Bradford and Bingley, one per 44,000. Nominations should be based on a percentage of the total membership, with an absolute maximum written into the legislation.

Membership of societies could be restricted to people with an interest in its activities, not abused by those interested only in asset-stripping the society for their own benefit. To gain ownership rights in a society, applicants should be members for a minimum period of, say, one, two or three years. That would return societies to their original ideal of requiring new customers to save with them before gaining membership or its benefits.

Is it reasonable to ask societies to go through the disruption and uncertainty inherent in the campaigns being mounted by members for conversion and other like-minded groups? They can stand every year with impunity and little financial outlay, yet the cost to societies of mounting a reasonable defence, and from the disruption of normal business, is enormous. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the framework of regulation should provide stability and ensure that societies cannot

be held to ransom by small and unrepresentative groups with no commitment to the objectives of the mutual organisations of which they are members.

Building societies have been with us for more than 200 years and have more than 100 years of expertise in the savings and mortgage markets. If they and their expertise are not to be undermined, action is necessary to deal with the difficulties and disruption that they face.

11.43 am

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): In the interests of brevity, I shall not repeat the globetrotting account of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess). I shall limit myself to the problems of West Sussex, which includes my constituency, and consider the Government's effect on it. There is a growing feeling that we are being victimised to the benefit of new Labour's friends in the northern metropolitan boroughs and, in particular, those with distinctly old Labour profligate spending habits.

First, I shall discuss last week's shocking announcement by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions that West Sussex is to be singled out. An additional 12,800 homes are to be built in our county by 2011, on top of the 37,900 already agreed in the county structure plan. It is ironic that while the Government were talking up their credentials on greenhouse gases, the Secretary of State was busy putting another nail in the coffin of the West Sussex green belt, a most un-environmentally friendly gesture from an apparently environmentally friendly Deputy Prime Minister.

Earlier this year, an independent panel concluded that there was no case for increasing the housing allocation figures for West Sussex. It was an independent panel, and a fair and square decision. The Secretary of State was represented on the panel and made no objection then. Now, in a fit of pique, he has decided to kick over the table, take home his toys and object. The inquiry recognised that West Sussex had few brown-field sites left on which to allocate additional housing. It recognised that large parts of the county are taken up by the downs, which are dominated by areas of outstanding natural beauty. It recognised that West Sussex lacked the infrastructure, especially roads, to deal with the extra pressures that a further 30,000 people would bring as a result of the extra allocation of houses, let alone the effects of extra traffic on the CO_2 emissions with which the Kyoto conference was so taken up.

The inquiry, with its independent judgment, also recognised the impact that the additional houses would have on the delicate balance between jobs and homes, especially in my densely populated patch of West Sussex on the coastal strip, where unemployment is already well above average. We are certainly not enjoying the image of the cosy south that is often portrayed. The extra homes allocation is the equivalent of adding a new Basingstoke to our county. West Sussex is in danger of becoming a massive semi-rural suburbia circling the downs.

The decision met widespread opposition. The county council and the three leaders of the political parties on it were united in their opposition and have called for a judicial review, which I support. The decision is opposed by the seven Conservative Members in West Sussex. It was also opposed by the Council for the Protection of Rural England, whose press release stated:

"The draft West Sussex Structure Plan had been agreed by a careful analysis of housing and environmental needs in the county. It stood as a beacon of a more common sense approach to planning new housing development and its housebuilding levels, significantly below those set out in Government planning guidance, received independent official support . . . The new Government has made an appalling start to meeting the challenge of providing new homes in ways that renew our towns instead of concreting the countryside. This decision is both undemocratic and environmentally damaging. What is the point of giving local authorities flexibility in planning future housebuilding levels if politicians simply reinstate their own inflexible figures?"

The Sussex Wildlife Trust stated:

"This makes a mockery of the enormous amount of work done to establish a sustainable level of housing development in West Sussex."

More houses

"would cause ongoing environmental damage . . . This 'Environmental capacity' argument was accepted by the independent inspector at the Examination in Public . . . The news is a severe blow against local democracy. The EIP process appears to have been a waste of time and resources. The month of eloquent discussion and the winning of the argument count for nothing against an ill-judged government direction."

Those are environmentally independent commentators on this shambolic decision. Only the House-Builders Federation has said anything supportive about the Secretary of State's decision. That speaks for itself.

We are being forced to have the extra houses despite the fact that the basis of the house building allocation figures is being called into question. Dubious, trend-based household projections are too inflexible. We want figures based on housing need, not projected demand. If some Labour councillors in the north of England got their act together on renting out empty council houses that lie idle for months at a time, and used the brown-field sites in their cities better, we would not have these problems foisted upon us in the south of England.

The decision is an attack on local democracy, particularly against Conservative West Sussex county council. A plank of the policy on which it was elected was protecting the strategic green gaps, which are all too few, especially along the coastal strip.

It is difficult to see how the people of West Sussex have derived any benefit from the Government. Instead, we appear to be the major victims of a series of often dogmatic and ill-thought-out measures which disadvantage my constituents more than most. What have the Government got against Sussex? It started at the beginning of the Session with the abolition of the assisted places scheme. We have many fine schools in Sussex which have benefited many pupils from less well-off backgrounds, but that opportunity will now be lost.

The Budget in July included the abolition of tax relief for pensioner medical insurance policies. As I have mentioned time and again, Worthing has the highest proportion of pensioners in the country. It is no surprise, therefore, to learn that we have the highest proportion of pensioners with such medical insurance policies. We also have one of worst problems in the country in terms of waiting lists for treatment at our local hospitals. Given that more than 100,000 of those policies have already not been renewed, the impact on my part of West Sussex will be dramatic.

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

Recently, we have had the latest complete horlicks on beef, which affects many Sussex farmers—I will leave it to my colleagues to go into detail about that. Most recently, the proposals for the individual savings account are shambolic and will work particularly to the detriment of the older, prudent savers nearing retirement, of whom there are many in Sussex and in my constituency. Those proposals threaten to be a breach of trust and harsh retrospective tax legislation. They are seriously flawed and I hope that the Government will take full account of the many voices of opposition expressed in what I hope will be a genuine consultation process.

Finally, let us consider the council finance allocations, which were announced just the other day. The extra £16 million allocated to West Sussex will not even cover the inflation element. It will not cover the extra pupil spend in West Sussex and the extra costs that will be associated with the development of special educational needs as proposed in the Green Paper. That allocation will not cover the £3.4 million hole that has been knocked in the West Sussex pension scheme because of the pension tax announced in the July Budget. That allocation is equivalent to another backdoor tax, which is likely to be imposed to the detriment of my constituents because council tax bills are set to increase by between 10 and 12 per cent. Again, that is the result of standard spending assessment changes that favour Labour's northern friends.

Many other things have not helped West Sussex. You will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for believing that the Government have something Sussexist about them. My constituents are increasingly of the belief that they are to be the unwitting victims of new Labour's designs on the retired and other disabled, the environment-loving, prudent-saving, beef-eating and beef-producing, council-tax-paying, pension-fund-owning and interest-rate-sensitive folk of middle England, who just happen to live in one of the most beautiful corners of this kingdom.

11.52 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I shall be brief because I know that the House also wants to hear the hon. Member for Belfast South (Rev. Martin Smyth), should he catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I had intended to raise two matters in some detail. The first relates to the concerns expressed by former prisoners of war about the continuing failure of the Government to meet their justifiable request that their salary deductions, taken from them during the war, should be restored to them. I hope to return to that matter on another occasion.

On occasions such as this there is a certain element of ritual. We are apparently arguing seriously that we do not want the House of Commons to rise for Christmas until it has debated particular subjects. Normally, if hon. Members thought that there was any risk that they might not get away in time for Christmas, they would not be seen in the Chamber for this debate. There is, however, a subject that I think should be debated, and time should be made available for it on Monday or Tuesday of next week.

I am sure that I am not alone when I say that I would gladly give up the opportunity to spend more time with my family to come to the House to debate something that desperately needs to be discussed—the order implementing the beef on the bone ban.

That order automatically came into effect last night, but we have not even debated it. Its consequences for the rural community, and that far beyond it, could scarcely be more extreme. Last week, I went to my local market at Newton Abbott; at the weekend, I spoke to farmers; and I was present at a National Farmers Union rally that was held in the Grand Committee Room 48 hours ago. On each occasion, I met people who are concerned not only that their income might go down, but that their entire way of life will be devastated. Those people are looking into the abyss, and see that they might lose not just their business, farms, homes and the rest, but the way of life that they and their fathers before them have always followed. And why? It is due, latterly, to the implementation of a ban that was not even necessary. It would have been quite possible to give the public a warning so that they could make up their minds, but the Government chose not to do that. There may be reasons—ones which I might find incomprehensible—why the Government, when faced with the option to issue an warning, decided to impose a ban. Surely such a ban, whose impact is so crucial and critical, is something which we should have the opportunity to debate.

That ban is bad law, because, as one butcher asked recently, "How am I supposed to tell the precise age of an oxtail?" It is not good enough for the Government simply to say," It matters not. We have carried out our parliamentary duty. We have laid the order and we do not need to debate it." That is not the right and proper way to proceed.

I was unable to be present at a rally that took place in Exeter, which had been organised by the NFU, because I was committed to speak at a rally in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) attended, as did my wife, on my part, and she reported back to me. She told me that she had seen people, some of whom we have known all our lives, who were in a state of distress the like of which I have never witnessed. The new ban is the straw that will break the camel's back.

I find it simply incredible that we, on our salaries, can go off soon and enjoy Christmas with our families, when we know that all we have to face is the judgment of our electorate every five years—with the exception of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who has had to face it more often than some of us. Those poor farmers are facing a judgment, the results of which could be terminal, and that should be debated in the House.

11.55 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a contribution. I understand the argument about the restrictions on meat and I know that the concerns expressed would be echoed by many in Northern Ireland.

I should like to consider an old problem, the workings of the Child Support Agency. We have already heard today how different legislation passed by the House is not always thought out carefully and that establishing the CSA is one such example. We all agreed that something needed to be done, but, as a result, problems have arisen with the administration of it.

A constituent of mine provided for the family, but then things began to go wrong. Unfortunately, it would appear that the CSA is prepared to listen more to the mother than to the father. It is investigating that man without investigating the mother's statements.

Such problems are coupled with others that I have discovered. For example, when the Benefits Agency says that a child is receiving benefit, the CSA has no alternative but to accept that that individual is a child. That happened in one case despite the fact that the CSA was advised on more than two occasions that the child had left school, although the mother claimed that he was still attending. When documentary evidence was presented to the CSA, it did not follow it through. I have written constantly to the CSA office in Belfast about that case, and it has finally agreed to re-examine it. Surely greater care should be taken in providing child benefit to children who are past the age of normal school education and are not in further education.

I appreciated the contribution from the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), because it is necessary for the House to tackle the problem of personation at elections. It was thought that it occurred only in Northern Ireland, but we were all aware that it has taken place in England, Scotland and Wales. It is nearly time for the House to provide foolproof identity documentation, rather than leaving it to the presiding officer to make a challenge that cannot be followed through there and then.

As for bad legislation, we had devastating riots in Londonderry last week. I understand that business leaders and the great and the good in the Churches now say that those who organise parades or demonstrations should be responsible for the damage. I ask the House not to go down that road, because it would be a charter for the rioter.

If there are those who are prepared to riot and destroy property, the organisers of that activity and those perpetrating it should be held responsible in law, rather than those who have a legitimate right to parade, protest or demonstrate. If we went down the other road and allowed a rioters' charter, we would be failing our people in our democratic structures.

11.59 am

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I begin by paying a very real tribute to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) for their admirably succinct speeches, in which they both made powerful points.

In my winding-up speech, I shall try to refer to all the hon. Members who have spoken, but I must first point out that it was a couple of nights ago that we had the formal vote on whether we should rise for the recess on Monday. I rather regret the change in the procedures of the House that prevents a vote at the end of this debate, because it would have been good to register a protest.

I object to the fact that we are rising on Monday, not because I mind being here but because it has come about as a result of the Government's inept management of their timetable. We were brought back from the long recess much later than we normally are and now we are bringing all Members—and, more important, all the members of staff who serve us so well and so selflessly—back on Monday for just one day.

I warned the Leader of the House that I would raise the point, so I am not being discourteous. It is a pity that we should go to all that trouble and expense merely because the Government could not get their legislative act together more effectively. I tabled a question to the right hon. Lady asking what estimate she had made of the costs that will be incurred as a result of the decision that the House should sit for a single day. I also asked whether the figure included an estimate for travel expenses for Members.

I was asked to delete the second part of my question, because a colleague had already asked it. I readily agreed. However, the answer to my question referred only to that second part, saying that it was not possible to provide a realistic estimate of travel costs for one day's travel to and from Westminster. That is nonsense. We need to know what the total cost will be.

I say this in a gentle spirit, because I do not want to spoil the season of good will, but I hope that the Government will get their act together better next year and that we shall move towards a more strictly defined parliamentary year. That would benefit all Members and those who serve us.

The problem is not that Members wish to be on holiday early; many of us will have to abandon the Christmas visits that we like to make to places such as residential homes, prisons and hospitals. This year, many of us will not be able to do what we would like to do in that regard.

The debate began with a plea, in a powerful speech by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), for the banning of asbestos in all its forms and ended with a plea for the abandonment of the ban on beef on the bone. I hope that the comments of the hon. Member for Tooting, based on much investigation and experience and on his work in the Council of Europe, which is greatly appreciated, will be taken to heart by his colleagues on the Front Bench.

As for beef, I hope that, during the season of Christmas when, I trust, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will have a happy time with his family and some pleasant meals, he will reflect on the enormous damage that he has done by his precipitate action and panic measure.

Every Member who decides to smoke sees a warning on the cigarette packet when he or she buys one. We know that there is a risk. I recently tabled a question relating to the 120,000 people who died from smoking-related illness in 1995. The risk associated with beef on the bone announced in the House a fortnight ago is infinitesimal. We are not even sure there is a risk—yet, as a letter to one of the papers said yesterday, we have reached the ultimate nanny state in which our meat is to be cut up for us. That is nonsense and the damage that is being inflicted by not allowing people to choose is out of all proportion to the risk. A great industry is being put in severe jeopardy.

My first reaction on hearing the announcement of the ban was to ring my wife and instruct her to ring our butcher and get as much beef on the bone into our deep freeze as possible. I am glad that she did, because I am now told that those of us who have beef on the bone in the deep freeze are allowed to exercise our judgment as to whether we eat it. Incidentally, I wish that the Prime Minister had presented me with the 15 lb piece of beef that was delivered to Downing street the other day instead of putting it in the dustbin.

Beef is an important issue. Many other important issues have been touched upon. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) talked about appointments to various health service trusts. I have never believed that people should be appointed to public bodies on the basis of their political beliefs. It is a great

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

pity that, over the years, we have departed from the system under which a Conservative Government appointed Alf Robens to run the National Coal Board and a Labour Government sent Sir Christopher Soames as ambassador to Paris. In each case, the Prime Minister of the day chose the man best suited to the job.

My right hon. Friend cited a number of people she appointed to health service trusts when she was Secretary of State. She mentioned Baroness Jay, Baroness Hayman and several others. It is a great pity, to put it no higher, that the Government now appear not only to have embarked on a purge of those who were previously appointed, but to be so cavalier in their attitude to those people's public service that they learn about their replacement through telephone calls from their successors. That is not acceptable.

I have a great belief in the ideal of public service. Public service should be encouraged wherever it is found. I do not mind what the political affiliation of a man or woman appointed to a public body is so long as that person is dedicated to public service and is willing to serve. Purging the health service of those who have given a great deal will do it a great disservice.

I shall say little about the speech made by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). I am sorry he is not in his place now. I do not like to be unkind, especially at this time of year, but in my notes I wrote that here we had a prig being sanctimonious. In his absence, I say to the hon. Gentleman that I hope that if he ever finds himself in any trouble, personal or any other sort, he is treated with a little more charity than he displayed this morning.

I do not know all the rights and wrongs of the Aitken affair. Jonathan Aitken was and is a friend of mine, although I find some of his apparent actions incomprehensible. To presume guilt and condemn someone on the Floor of the House before we know whether charges are to be preferred is an abuse of the privileges of the House.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) explained to me that he would not be in his place for the winding-up speeches because he is attending an important meeting of his party. He made a splendid speech, as he always does on such occasions, in which he made a plea for a co-ordinated energy policy. He made no apology for plugging coal and I hope that when the Minister replies he will give some encouragement to the pilot scheme for which the hon. Gentleman argued with such understandable passion.

I shall refer later to what was said by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), but first I want to comment on the interesting speech made by the new, or rather the re-elected, hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). It would be churlish not to congratulate him warmly on his decisive victory, and I do so without reservation.

The hon. Gentleman brought to the attention of the House in a most appropriate manner the shortcomings of our petition system. As he said to me privately after his speech, he would have been more than happy not to have taken his seat had we had a system for investigating petitions quickly. I think that we should have such a system.

The hon. Gentleman also touched on the problem of personation, as did the hon. Member for Belfast, South. Most of us prefer not to recognise that problem, but we should recognise it and the points that he made should be taken to heart. I thank him for raising the issue and I hope that action will be taken.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), who is a fellow Staffordshire Member, referred to the problem of compensation for people who face the loss of home or business because of road building and other public works schemes. A number of motorways have been proposed for or put through my constituency, so I echo his remarks. I hope that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will take note of the hon. Gentleman's points.

I cannot begin to touch on all the matters raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who took us from Kyoto to suicide via vitamin B6, Cyprus and the Palace theatre, Westcliff. If he can produce such a veritable tour de force in 10 minutes, he should be at the Palace theatre, Westcliff. I hope that he will repair there during the pantomime season.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made an important speech, as did my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham. They were both concerned about natural justice to Members of the House who find themselves in difficulties and the need for a proper appellate system. As I said when I wound up the debate on the so-called Hamilton affair, I believe that we should examine these matters most carefully.

It is no criticism of any of the individuals involved, still less of Sir Gordon Downey, to say that what has happened recently leaves a lot to be desired. Although we have not yet come to any absolute conclusions, the comments of my right hon. Friend about an appellate body have much to commend them. My personal view—I do not speak for my party—is that a group of three or four distinguished former hon. Members from the various parties, who know the ways of the House, presided over by a former Speaker, might be a good appellate body. We must come up with something, because we should not leave matters as untidily as they have been left following the Hamilton affair.

All I would say to Mr. Hamilton is what I said in the House a few weeks ago. I hope that he and all those with whom he comes into contact will recognise that the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, for all its imperfections and for all the imperfections of its report, made it plain that it would not have recommended expulsion from the House. I hope that he will derive some comfort from that, although I find some of his actions difficult to understand.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) spoke with authority about building societies and the concept of mutuality. It behoves us all, especially Conservative Members, because we have done so much to further the property-owning democracy, to realise that our efforts would not have met such success were it not for the building society movement. There is a continuing place for that movement.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) talked about the impact of potential housing development in West Sussex. Anyone who has the privilege of representing a rural area and who

values the importance of the green belt knows how crucial it is that insensitive development does not swallow up the finite resources of our beautiful countryside and fine farmland. My hon. Friend has the great good fortune of having a beautiful constituency and I well understand why he feels its vulnerability and feels obliged to speak as he did this morning. He has my full support.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South referred to the Child Support Agency. There is not a Member in the House, of any party, who has not had some unfortunate examples of the agency's operations. Hon. Members in the previous Parliament agreed that the Child Support Agency should be established. When the previous Government introduced proposals, they found support from the then Opposition. We all have some responsibility, especially to ensure that the system continues to be improved. Improvements have been made in recent months and I pay tribute to my right hon. and hon. Friends who were in government before May for setting many of those improvements in train, but the agency is still far from perfect.

I have one minute before the Minister speaks. I understand why the Leader of the House is not present: she has explained to me that she has Privy Council duties. I should like to take this final opportunity to wish the Minister, hon. Members who are present and those who are not an extremely happy Christmas. Let us hope that we return in good spirits and in good humour in the new year.

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I apologise for missing two speeches. As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, the Leader of the House has unfortunately to attend to Privy Council business. I am afraid that I am an inadequate deputy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) raised the issue of asbestos. I have to state an interest, as I am the honorary secretary of the Liverpool and district asbestos victim support group. I hold that post because, seven years ago, I watched my brother John die from mesothelioma, which is a terrible, debilitating disease. Anyone who has seen someone suffer from the effects of ingesting asbestos must have every sympathy with my hon. Friend's comments. The Government are determined to deal energetically and decisively with all aspects of the asbestos problem. Ministers are currently considering advice from the Health and Safety Commission on a mechanism and timetable for a domestic ban on the import, supply and use of asbestos products. The Government plan to make an announcement early in the new year.

I was more than a little amazed to hear the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) refer to the politicisation of appointments to health trusts. I remind her that, a few years ago, I tabled about 800 questions in a short space of time to find out who sat on health trusts and various other quangos. For a very long time, that was a secret garden for hon. Members and for the public.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has made it clear that health trusts will meet in the open. Appointments to trusts will be on merit, which has purportedly always been the case, but was allegedly not the case under the previous Government. I am happy to tell the right hon. Lady that we have issued a consultation paper on all quangos, including health trusts. To the best of my knowledge, no one has been excluded from a health trust because of the political bias of sponsoring Ministers or anyone else.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Lord Nolan commended the mechanisms used for health service appointments. He ruled out allegations of political bias and commended the further improvements that had been introduced. That being so, will the Minister take up the many examples that I can feed to him of people who have been treated in a discourteous, not to say offensive, manner?

Mr. Kilfoyle: In the spirit of openness that characterises the new Government, I am perfectly willing to look into any suggestions of abuse or discourtesy. That is the difference between us and the previous Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) caused some controversy. A senior detective from the specialist operations department has been appointed to investigate the allegation to which he referred. The matter is being pursued as expeditiously as possible. When the investigation is complete, a report will be sent to the Crown Prosecution Service. That is all that needs to be said about that matter now.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who has apologised for not being here for the winding-up speeches, were concerned about the procedures that surround what has become known as the Neil Hamilton affair. In its report on Mr. Hamilton, the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges said that it would review its procedure in the light of some of the issues that the Hamilton inquiry raised. In his speech, the Chairman of that Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said that the Committee would report to the House when it had completed its review. It is appropriate to await the outcome of that review, at which time the House can decide what, if anything, needs to be done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) habitually raises the issue of the coal industry of whose interests he has been a long-time and heroic defender. He also spoke about Remploy. I am sorry that he has left the Chamber because I should have liked to tell him that I, too, have a great interest in Remploy. It has a large factory in my constituency and I am aware of its work.

The Government's objective is to ensure secure, diverse energy supplies at competitive prices and we certainly want coal to play its part in meeting that objective. The Government cannot intervene directly in negotiations between coal companies and generators, but we have made plain to all involved our concern about the future of the United Kingdom's coal industry.

We have taken some key actions to create a level playing field so that coal can compete fairly. They include challenging German and Spanish coal subsidies so that we may maximise markets for UK coal, and removing by way of the Fossil Fuel Levy Bill the advantage that nuclear energy and imported nuclear energy from France enjoy by exemption from that levy. We are asking the gas regulator to examine the resale provisions of early

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

taper-pay gas contracts to establish whether they distort the market against coal, and we are examining many other issues.

In the context of Remploy, the Government are making available an extra £195 million from the windfall levy to pay for a range of measures that will help disabled people and those with long-standing illnesses to get work and training.

The hon. Member for Winchester twice over (Mr. Oaten) raised some important issues. Before entering Parliament, I was a professional, or perhaps unprofessional, organiser for the Labour party. I was an election agent and I understand perfectly the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman faced. He spoke about people with posters who signed other people's nomination forms. I do not know whether that is a comment on their political literacy or on the system. The Government appreciate that there are real and major problems.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that she encountered a problem in her constituency where a candidate stood under the name of Fran Taylor. My right hon. Friend was No. 7 on the list and Fran Taylor was at No. 6 and Fran Taylor's name was called. Those who are mindful to deceive find it easy to put an idea in someone's mind.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) spoke about personation. We laugh at the old adage, vote early and vote often, but it is not funny when such actions determine the outcome of an election. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering measures such as descriptions on ballot forms. Hon. Members will remember the use of the term "Literal Democrat". Rolling registers must also be considered. The Home Office working group on electoral procedures will shortly meet under the chairmanship of the Under-Secretary of State, my near neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth). That group will look at electoral matters to determine how the House could solve some of the problems that have been adumbrated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) spoke eloquently and passionately about a subject that is near to his heart—a new road. The roads review is broadly based and we need to ask fundamental questions in the context of an emerging integrated transport policy. The Government believe in consulting the public on the roads programme. That is a novelty compared with the actions of the previous Government. We sponsored two public consultations on the issue that my hon. Friend raised and the results are being carefully considered.

Where do I begin to reply to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess)? Do I start by taking responsibility on the Government's behalf for eradicating suicide this Christmas or should we revisit Kyoto and ensure that the Americans whole-heartedly agree with all that we say? Overnight, should we resolve all the difficulties in Cyprus? Resolution of the vitamin B6 problem would probably be simple. The hon. Gentleman presented a long list. I was baffled by his comments about the Palace theatre in Westcliff. I assume that he wants money for the theatre from the Eastern area arts board. I understood that such matters were deliberately placed at arm's length so that Ministers could not interfere, so it would be unprofessional and unethical for me to venture an opinion.

In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), I once again admit complete ignorance of all matters relating to mutual and non-mutual societies. I shall undertake to speak to my ministerial colleagues in the Treasury and give my hon. Friend a substantive reply.

The speech by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) was almost an attack on the Government and I thought that the Opposition had finally found their feet. There was a swing of 11 per cent. to Labour in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, so not everybody was anti-Labour. There was a sniff, a slight smell, of NIMBYism in his view. I am certainly not a Sussex-phobe. He spoke about an extra 30,000 people and about the fumes from their cars, but such problems do not stop at the borders of West Sussex. They are part of a rather wider issue which the Kyoto conference tried to address.

The hon. Gentleman engaged in unwarranted attacks on northern authorities. There are about 800,000 vacant homes in Britain, and 667,000 of them are privately owned. The Government are trying to draw attention to that imbalance and to engage in small, symbolic actions. That is why I accompanied my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing at this morning's Centrepoint opening of accommodation for the homeless at Admiralty Arch. The idea that vast hordes of northern people are making their way here to steal homes from Sussex people is rather beyond the pale.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the assisted places scheme. In opposition, I was one of those who worked on the policy to remove that scheme, which was invidious in educational and social terms. Happily, it has been removed.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) raised an issue that is dear to his heart and to those of many other Opposition and Labour Members. New experimental evidence shows that BSE infectivity may be present in tissues that are normally removed when beef is deboned. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has emphasised that the risk to consumers is very small, and we can agree on that. The Government's first priorities are the protection of the consumer and the maintenance of public confidence in food. Action is being taken, although I admit that it is precautionary, to ensure that consumers continue to get the highest protection against BSE. We will not play fast and loose with public health. No responsible Government could knowingly allow infected material into the human food chain. That would betray not only our standing with consumers but our trading position in Europe.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South rightly drew the House's attention to Child Support Agency services. There is no disagreement on the matter between the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), and me on that subject. All aspects of the agency's services will be examined in the Government's comprehensive spending review, which will seek ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness, especially in areas that are of greatest importance to parents. Like the hon. Member for Belfast, South, I have regularly had the distressing experience of trying to explain to my constituents the inequities of the system as it currently obtains.

In reply to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire, I say that it is not possible to provide a realistic estimate of the cost involved in bringing the House back for one day. We know that we have to come back to deal with important business in the heavy legislative programme of a Government who are committed to change. Finally, I wish him, Opposition Members, my right hon. and hon. Friends and the staff of the House a very merry and happy Christmas.

Mediation Services

12.29 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise the subject of mediation services in the Adjournment debate. My aim is to highlight the good work that all mediation services carry out, and to suggest that they are so cost-effective that the Government should consider promoting them in future.

When I suggested the title for this Adjournment debate, I wondered which Minister would attend, as mediation services encompass a wide cross-section of the Government's corporate activity; and I am happy to see the Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), present today.

Mediation is a process whereby a third party helps two disputing parties to resolve their disagreements. The disputing parties—not the mediator—determine the final outcome. Currently, mediation is used most commonly to resolve disputes between neighbours, and I shall concentrate on that aspect today. However, mediation is also applied to victims and offenders, bullying in schools, family feuds, divorce, domestic violence and commercial and industrial disputes.

In mediation, the mediator approaches the first party, who has been referred to the service, then the second party, and attempts to get both parties to proceed to mediation. About 30 per cent. of those who agree to mediation meet face to face; of the rest, about 40 per cent. are dealt with by shuttle diplomacy, and various alternative solutions are found for the remainder. Mediators usually follow up cases after initial agreements have been reached, to ensure that they are long lasting. Agreements often involve reparation—for example, an apology or repair of damage.

Only a small number of neighbour disputes are referred—89 per cent. are resolved informally between the neighbours themselves. Apart from self-referrals, most referrals come from the local authority, especially housing and environmental health departments, but they also come from the police and citizens advice bureaux.

The cause of 60 per cent. of complaints is noise—for example, from barking dogs, hi-fi music, loud television sets, burglar alarms, noisy children, do-it-yourself activities and household appliances. Boundary disputes, untidy gardens, overhanging trees and the parking of vehicles are other prominent causes of dispute.

Neighbour disputes can escalate out of control. They can become extremely costly both to the disputants and to the agencies involved, and they sometimes result in violence or even fatalities. At the very least, they can cause untold misery to many of our citizens—for example, a boundary dispute involving a fast-growing conifer hedge began in 1979, lasted 17 years and resulted in £100,000 in court costs.

I joined Bolton metropolitan borough council in 1977. For 20 years, I have served its housing committee; I was its vice-chairman for two years and its chairman for 10 years from 1986 to 1996. I soon realised that elected members, but more especially housing and environmental health officers, spent a disproportionate amount of their time dealing with neighbour disputes.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

I therefore decided to set up what became the first local authority-run neighbour dispute service in the entire United Kingdom—Bolton Neighbour Dispute Service, or BNDS. Its co-ordinator, Sue Parry, was appointed using inner-urban programme money in September 1991, and soon afterwards we appointed an administrative assistant, and 25 volunteers were sought and trained.

On 29 June 1992, a pilot scheme was launched in the Deane and Daubhill areas of my constituency. In the first year, the budget was £29,300, and in the first six months 45 cases were dealt with. Bolton was careful to involve all householders, whether public sector or private. The budget for 1995–96 was £40,000, 50 per cent. being met from the housing revenue account and 50 per cent. from the general rate fund.

Today, BNDS operates across the 110,000 homes of the borough. Although it is sponsored by the housing department and the council, it operates independent of the council. Up to a maximum of 42 volunteers have now enrolled for training. They have a job description, and handle one case at a time, often working in pairs.

The Bolton service has been a model for the start-up of many similar schemes throughout the country. In the three months from April to June 1997, 49 cases were closed. Of those, eight were not thought suitable for mediation, eight first parties withdrew, and in a further eight cases, the second party was unwilling to participate. Of the remainder—that is, the 51 per cent. of referrals that agreed to participate—24 cases out of 25 were successfully resolved, which is a success rate of 96 per cent. That period snapshot is not atypical of the service.

Mediation grew out of the United State and Australia. Neighbour mediation first appeared in the United Kingdom in 1980; by 1985, only three operational schemes were known; in 1996, there were 54 schemes; and today, in 1997, there are nearly 100. In other words, growth has been rapid in the 1990s. It is interesting to note that, in the early days, the Quakers showed the most interest in mediation.

Despite the cost-effectiveness of mediation services, funding is the major constraint on growth. Some schemes have been supported by charitable trusts, but most rely on rather insecure local and national government grants. "Neighbour Disputes" by Jim Dignan, Angela Sorsby and Jeremy Hibbert, published by the university of Sheffield in 1996, is one of the few detailed pieces of research in this area, and it compares very favourably the costs of mediation with those of alternative approaches involving the courts and various legislative procedures. It would be nice if the Minister would look at the problem of funding, and promote mediation as an extremely cost-effective method of dealing with many issues.

An umbrella organisation called Mediation UK developed in Beaconsfield from a Home Office secondment. Its headquarters has been in Bristol since 1991. Such a national organisation is essential to promote best practice, organise training and, perhaps most important, provide accreditation for new and old organisations alike. Mediation UK has a funding problem too.

I shall briefly mention one spin-off from the BNDS—the "bully-free zone" programme, of which I am proud to be a patron. Bullying in our schools has been in the headlines recently. In Bolton, a grant was obtained to introduce into eight volunteer pilot schools peer mediation, whereby trained senior pupils mediate between bullies and victims. Of course, serious cases are referred to school staff. Initial signs are good, and, if the pilot scheme proves successful, it will be expanded to all schools that want to participate.

I am pleased to announce that, last week here in London, that pioneering scheme was honoured for outstanding citizenship at a major awards ceremony in memory of murdered London headmaster Philip Lawrence. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and Mr. Lawrence's widow, Frances, presented a plaque to four young people who had participated in the scheme.

I hope that I have demonstrated the usefulness of mediation services and I look forward to the Minister's response. I might add that Lord Woolf speaks very favourably of ADR—alternative dispute resolution—in his interim report to the Lord Chancellor on the civil justice system in England and Wales, "Access to Justice", published in 1995.

I thank the countless individuals, including thousands of volunteers, who have helped to make all the mediation services such a great success across the United Kingdom.

12.40 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on his success in securing this debate. I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the issues he has raised about mediation services—an extremely important subject.

As my hon. Friend said, mediation is one of those subjects that cut across a number of Government Departments. He indicated some curiosity as to which Minister would reply, so I should start by offering him an explanation of why I am here.

I am replying to the debate because my Department has been actively involved in encouraging and promoting mediation as a possible alternative, which may be more appropriate than the statutory routes and sanctions when dealing with some types of neighbour disputes. That is particularly true in relation to disputes involving noise, but it may also apply in some other disputes involving general anti-social behaviour.

Complaints about neighbour noise have continued to rise in recent years. My Department set up a working party in October 1994 to investigate a variety of options for strengthening the current controls over neighbourhood noise nuisance. The working party considered, in particular, whether there were alternative, informal remedies that might provide swifter relief for noise sufferers.

In its conclusions and recommendations, the working party acknowledged the value of informal remedies, such as mediation, to deal with complaints of noise nuisance. The working party agreed that local authorities and the public should continue to be encouraged to resolve neighbour dispute problems informally, where this was appropriate.

In November 1994, the Department issued an information paper, "Mediation; Benefits and Practice", to chief environmental health and chief housing officers

in local authorities in England and Wales. That paper encouraged local authorities to consider mediation as a possible option to resolve noise and other neighbour disputes. In addition, my Department, when responding to noise complaints, includes in correspondence leaflets that mention

"the services of mediation as a solution to disputes."

The working party also recommended that the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health should produce best-practice guidance for distribution to local authorities on the management of noise services. Within the "Noise Management Guide", which was published in February this year, the institute has recommended that

"mediation should be considered as an integral part of the local authority response to noise complaints".

My hon. Friend referred to the work of the Bolton neighbourhood dispute service, which he helped to set up. I congratulate him on that initiative; I was pleased to learn of the project's success.

In my constituency, there is a very successful mediation service called the Greenwich mediation service. The organisation is funded from the housing revenue account, and currently only handles disputes involving council tenants. However, I understand that the source funding may be changed to enable the service to be available to all borough residents, as is clearly the case in Bolton with the initiative that my hon. Friend helped to establish.

My hon. Friend referred to research on neighbour disputes undertaken by the centre for criminology and legal research at the university of Sheffield. That was jointly funded by the then Department of the Environment and the Lankelly Foundation. That research considered the cost-effectiveness of mediation and alternative approaches.

The report's findings call into question the effectiveness of both the formal and informal approaches conventionally adopted for handling neighbour disputes. It suggests that mediation might offer a more constructive solution to the problem where both parties are willing to give it a try.

The findings also suggest that there is genuine scope for significant savings to be made by using mediation in appropriate cases, especially in relation to some of the more intractable neighbour disputes with which housing and environmental services are routinely called to deal. The report proposes a strategy for increasing the number of cases that could be dealt with by means of mediation, and identifies a number of suggestions for further research.

In order to publicise the message contained in that report, the then Department of the Environment sent in November 1996 a copy of its executive summary, and a leaflet which gave advice to those considering setting up a community mediation service, to each chief housing and environmental health officer of every local authority in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In March 1996, the DOE appointed the Building Research Establishment to undertake research that would increase the understanding of domestic noise complaints. The research was designed to address a number of issues, including the reasons for the complaints, the main types of noise sources, how the noise was measured and assessed, and the most effective methods adopted to resolve disputes. The project was to include an exploration of the effectiveness of current procedures for dealing with domestic noise complaints from the perspective of the investigating officer, the complainant and the person complained about.

The BRE research has found that there is a difference of opinion on what constitutes a satisfactorily resolved complaint between all three parties. On the ground of common sense, that is hardly surprising.

On mediation, the BRE believes that there is a need for guidelines that clarify the point at which mediation can be recommended without exposing the investigating officer to complaints of maladministration. It also concludes that the resolution of complaints by direct negotiation between neighbours should be facilitated, wherever appropriate. That endorses the view expressed by my hon. Friend when describing the work of the Bolton mediation service. The Department has only recently received the BRE's final report, and we are considering how best to publicise the report and what points need to be addressed.

I acknowledge my hon. Friend's concerns about funding, both for local mediation services and at a national level. At the local level, it is up to each local authority to decide how much is spent on which service in the light of local needs and priorities. Many local authorities, such as Bolton metropolitan district council and my authority in Greenwich, have established or supported local mediation services.

At the national level, my Department has been funding the umbrella organisation, Mediation UK—to which my hon. Friend alluded—since 1 April 1994, under the environmental action fund. That funding runs for a three-year cycle, and Mediation UK is now in its third year of EAF funding. In total, it has received more than £90,000 from my Department in that period.

For 1997–98, Mediation UK set a target of helping to bring 18 new community mediation services into existence, bringing that up to a total of 90 centres by 1998. It has already helped to set up 17 centres so far in 1997, and may well exceed its target. I believe that that is money well spent.

Mediation UK has submitted an application for a further three-year period of EAF support. It has submitted a bid for a grant of £50,300 in 1998–99. However, EAF funding is subject to great competition. My Department receives a large number of high-quality bids seeking the limited funding. We shall be considering all applications for EAF grant early next year, and hope to announce the successful applicants in early February. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will understand that I cannot pre-empt the process by saying whether Mediation UK's application is likely to be successful. However, I stress that we expect voluntary bodies to look widely for other sources of funding, including grants or sponsorship from the private sector and charitable trusts.

My hon. Friend referred to the contribution of the right hon. Lord Woolf in his interim report on alternative dispute resolution to the Lord Chancellor. The Lord Chancellor's Department has taken forward Lord Woolf's recommendations on ADR in several ways.

First, the Lord Chancellor's Department has published a booklet entitled "Resolving Disputes Without Going to Court" to help to make the public more aware of the possibilities that ADR can offer. I understand that the

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has recently sent copies of the booklet to new hon. Members for use in their constituency offices.

The booklet lists different organisations, including Mediation UK, that offer mediation, conciliation and arbitration services for non-family disputes. It gives a brief description of those services, and sets out some of their advantages and shortcomings. It is available from county courts, the royal courts of justice and many citizens advice bureaux and law centres. Copies have also been placed in the reference sections of public libraries, and have been sent to business links and business connect centres in England and Wales respectively. The Scottish Courts Administration has produced a similar publication covering Scotland.

Secondly, the Lord Chancellor's Department has recently consulted on case management proposals that provide an automatic three-month stay on request, if parties wish to use ADR. The Lord Chancellor is considering the responses to that consultation with a view to implementing the proposals in April 1999 as part of his package of civil justice reforms.

Thirdly, in November 1995, approval was given for a pilot scheme for alternative dispute resolution at Central London county court. The scheme has been running since May 1996. The Lord Chancellor's Department is funding academic research into the scheme to evaluate the impact of mediation on the outcome of cases.

Of particular interest and significance is the fact that the researcher is investigating why parties and/or their representatives have rejected the offer of mediation. Further pilot schemes are running at Bristol county court and in the Court of Appeal. The Lord Chancellor will examine the results of the research closely before deciding his next steps. He is concerned to assess whether current schemes result in successful and satisfactory outcomes and save money for both the parties concerned and the civil justice system.

My hon. Friend referred to his role as patron to the "bully-free zone" programme in Bolton. I was interested to hear about the pilot scheme introducing peer mediation in schools. Bullying and peer mediation in schools are, of course, matters for my colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment. However, I know that the Department takes the issue seriously, and I understand that it has made an anti-bullying pack available to all maintained schools in England.

It is important for schools to decide which strategies for tackling bullying best meet their pupils' needs and circumstances. In some situations, peer mediation may provide the answer, but in others a different approach may be necessary and more effective. Over the coming months, colleagues at the Department will consider what action might be taken to help schools to tackle and reduce bullying.

I hope that I have reassured my hon. Friend that the Government fully recognise the value that mediation can bring to the community. We do, however, recognise that using mediation to resolve a dispute may not always be possible or successful. Nevertheless, it is certainly one of the preferred options, and a much more civilised method than a confrontational approach.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): As the Minister for the next debate is not yet with us, I shall suspend the sitting until 1 o'clock.

12.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

Funeral Services

On resuming—

1 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice. What happens when an hon. Member is ready to make a speech but the Minister is not present? Is there any point in continuing without a Minister?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): The Standing Orders of the House are quite clear: we do exactly what we have just done.

Mr. Chidgey: I will make my remarks and hope that someone will respond to them in due course.

I am grateful for this opportunity to raise a matter that is causing widespread concern—namely the lack of regulation of the provision of funeral services. That concern is felt by the users of the services, who are the relatives of the deceased, and by the providers of the services, the funeral directors themselves. It is also now felt by charity workers who find themselves involved in selling prepaid funeral plans on commission for their charities. There is also concern in the financial services sector which finds that prepaid plans are being sold in the same way as financial services but without any statutory control.

I will speak for only about 10 minutes because I know that the Minister—who is not in his place—is keenly aware of the issue and I want to leave him as much time as possible to outline his proposals.

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Nigel Griffiths): The Minister is in his place. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to tell the House whether the account in the *Evening Standard,* to the effect that he has already raised the issue in the House, is accurate. It is not customary to use the past tense; hon. Members usually make a speech first and then issue a press release.

Mr. Chidgey: I am sure that I can resolve the confusion after I have finished my speech. I apologise for not recognising that the Minister was in his place; there was some confusion due to his late arrival.

One of the main causes of concern is cold calling by telephone—for instance, selling memorial plaques months after a cremation has taken place but while the bereaved are still suffering the trauma of losing a relative. *The Mail on Sunday* featured the case of Christine Hall from East Sussex, who received a mail shot advertising a prepaid funeral service. A few days after she had thrown it away, she received a telephone call from a charity which wanted to know whether she had received the literature it had sent her and whether she was interested in buying such a plan. She was asked whether she had booked a burial plot for herself and her husband and told that if she had not she should do so quickly. Christine is 62 and was upset by the timing of the call—and rightly so, as her husband Henry is 89 and seriously ill. It was a traumatic experience for them.

The *Daily Mirror* reported the case of Vanessa Rylance from Birkenhead, a woman whose 77-year old mother was diagnosed as having cancer. Days after her mother had left hospital, Vanessa received a hard-sell letter suggesting that she take out a plan to cover her death.

I will deal now with the concerns of the providers—the traditional, family-run funeral firms. It is now common knowledge that funeral provision is big business, and multinational organisations are moving into the market. In fact, some 25 per cent. of the business was bought by one company, which led to the involvement of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. In due course, that company was required to make some divestments to bring it within the regulations.

There is a lack of transparency about the ownership of funeral firms. As the Minister will know, there is a requirement for owners of a company to make their names and interests clear. When family businesses are bought out, there are far too many instances of the old name still appearing over the door of the funeral parlour; it is not until one goes into the back room that one finds a small plaque revealing the true owners of the firm.

There is also a lack of transparency in the prices. Far too often, people telephone funeral directors and receive a low quote, but the full price is not made clear. Once they get into the parlour, they are persuaded to spend far more on the funeral than they intended. The price quoted is the price of the funeral alone and does not include the cost of the burial plot, the church service, a book of remembrance, which is apparently becoming the vogue, or the headstone. There are disturbing cases of headstones being offered at a price way above that which would be charged if one went directly to the stonemason. In addition, plots rented in a crematorium have a habit of increasing in price over the years until the rents are far greater than was ever imagined.

There is also concern about mergers in the funeral business. Many family firms are being merged into international corporations, leading to lack of choice and competition. If one organisation owns the funeral parlours, crematoriums and cemeteries and provides the prepayment plans, that clearly means the removal of choice and a reduction of competition. The most worrying development, however, is that the same firms are now winning contracts for NHS bereavement services.

National health service hospitals are now in the business of contracting out those services that are not considered core health services—one of which is the bereavement service. Hospitals are putting the provision of such services out to tender, and it is understood that in one case a firm has offered to provide the service at a zero price. Why should anyone provide a service for nothing? Unfortunately, a large hospital can expect hundreds—perhaps even a thousand—deaths per year, and that number of funerals is big business.

It is very difficult for a bereaved relative or the relative of someone who is dying to distinguish between a bereavement counsellor, who is a trained psychologist and understands the effect of trauma, and a bereavement officer employed by a huge corporation whose main objective is to sell funerals.

My final and most important point relates to the marketing, selling and management of prepaid funeral plans. There has been some unfortunate negative publicity in the press about the selling of such plans by a firm called

[Mr. Chidgey]

SCI, an American funeral giant which is an offshoot of Age Concern. Age Concern is a highly respected charity which does a great deal of good work. It aspires to raise standards and introduce quality into the provision of funeral services.

Age Concern is a highly commendable charity, but it is impossible for an organisation to control the activities of over-zealous salesmen at the point of sale, and there are too many cases of elderly people suffering distress when subjected to the hard-sell approach. That distress is keenly felt by the charity workers. Negative publicity works against charitable aims, and I hope that Age Concern will be reviewing that aspect of the matter very carefully. Locking in prepaid funeral plans to one provider of funeral services is fundamentally anti-competitive. Anyone purchasing such a plan is obliged to use SCI-owned funeral parlours, so the plans limit choice and remove competition.

About £250 million is now invested in prepaid funeral plans, and there seems to be no regulation of the management of the funds thus amassed and no provision for purchasers to benefit from the profits accrued by those investments. The plans seem to be totally free of the requirements applying to other financial services under the financial services legislation.

Two years ago, the Office of Fair Trading recommended regulation of the funeral services industry. I understand that one of the Minister's colleagues is keenly interested—

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): The hon. Gentleman will be aware of my interest in regulation, because I wrote to him last week when he secured this debate. In his reply to me, he said that he could not allow me any time in the 15 minutes allotted for his speech because of the many Opposition Members who wished to speak in the debate. Where are they?

Mr. Chidgey: That was a spurious intervention. The point that I made to the hon. Gentleman—in a private letter which was written with the best of intentions—was that many hon. Members had asked to speak in this debate and I felt that it was only fair to say no to them all or there would be insufficient time for me to say what I hoped to say in 10 minutes, thereby allowing the Minister ample time to reply. That point should have been well taken by the hon. Gentleman.

I understand that the Minister's colleagues are well aware of the issue. When in opposition, the Government stated that they would examine the matter very soon after coming to power. I hope that the Minister has come today with some firm proposals and a timetable for legislation to regulate provision of funeral services, and in particular to deal with the issue of transparency of ownership of funeral parlours, crematoria and cemeteries, so as to maintain choice, competition and quality.

I hope especially that the Government have proposals to draw a clear line between NHS hospitals' bereavement counselling services and contracted-out bereavement services—which is really just another name for the commercial opportunity provided for large funeral directors to access markets for thousands of funerals.

I hope also that the Minister has proposals to regulate prepaid funeral plans so that investors in those plans, like investors in other schemes, will be covered by the Financial Services Act 1986.

I apologise to the Minister for not recognising him at the start of the debate, but I thought that the matter was the responsibility of one of his colleagues.

1.11 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Nigel Griffiths): I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) for the opportunity that he has given to the House to review this important issue. I welcome also the keen interest taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) in the funeral industry and in the problems that people may face when dealing with it. With more than 600,000 funerals organised every year in Britain, the subject touches the lives of millions of relatives.

People tend to use funeral directors at a time of maximum stress, and at such a vulnerable time it is important that they should receive proper protection. Fortunately, British funeral directors have a very long tradition of consoling relatives and of organising funerals with all the care and attention that is so important at that time. I want the high values that traditional British funeral directors have long upheld to be maintained. Some family firms have seen those values passed down through generations.

Almost three years ago, in 1995, the Office of Fair Trading reviewed the United Kingdom funeral business. The then Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Bryan Carsberg, said:

"the vast majority of those in business are honest, competent and concerned to meet consumers' needs responsibly."

That is as true today as it was then. However, Sir Bryan also warned of the risks facing the public from dishonest or incompetent funeral directors—who are only a tiny minority. He said, however, that the risks are significant.

It took the previous Government more than 12 months to consider Sir Bryan's report. They started consultation last year, but the findings were never published or shared with the public; they were—if the House will forgive the pun—buried.

On 7 May 1997, shortly after the general election, I met the new Director General of Fair Trading, John Bridgeman. We discussed, among other things, the 1995 report. I asked officials at the Department of Trade and Industry to examine the issue afresh and to report to me the options open to the new Government.

I have contacted all the main funeral trade associations, asking them what action they are taking to ensure that people who buy funeral plans are fully protected.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Minister perhaps clarify when he will be able to reach a conclusion on the recommendations made to him by his officials?

Mr. Griffiths: On 1 December 1997, I responded to a parliamentary question tabled by the hon. Gentleman. We appreciate the concerns that have been expressed about the issue, and we hope to reach a conclusion as early in the new year as possible.

Because of previous inaction, it is very important that the director general's report on action to deal with findings that are now more than three years old should be updated so that we do not try to take action against problems which have changed. I do not believe that problems no longer exist—we know that they do—but we should take that important opportunity to update our knowledge of the situation.

Mr. Caplin: In my hon. Friend's deliberations with officials and industry, will the establishment an independent ombudsman service be considered so that real consumer protection can be provided to those about whom the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) is so concerned?

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend is a great advocate of such a service, which he asked me about on 1 December. As I said then, I would certainly welcome the emergence of an independent scheme to protect consumers.

To avoid creating any doubt among those who provide funerals—funeral directors and prepayment plan providers—I have written to the main trade organisations asking what action they are taking to ensure that people who buy funeral plans are fully protected. I am seeking confirmation that in the case of prepaid funeral plans there is a binding obligation on the funeral director to perform the contract irrespective of any payment that the funeral director receives from the plan provider, and that that obligation is enforceable by the plan holder or his or her estate.

There are therefore three parties to the agreements: the person who takes out a contract, or his or her relative; the plan provider, who initially receives the money; and the person—the funeral director—who will provide the funeral. I am investigating whether, as I hope, the funeral director has a binding agreement with the person who has paid for the plan. It is up to funeral directors to ensure that they receive the money from the plan provider.

Mr. Chidgey: I draw the Minister's attention to plan providers—the person or organisation with whom the money is invested. I am concerned to hear the Minister's proposals for regulation of the sums involved, which are now considerable. Has he—from his deliberations and discussions—anything more to offer on regulation?

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I certainly hope to be able to offer the hon. Gentleman the plans. That was the exact subject of his previous helpful intervention, to which I replied. It goes to the core of the issues that are being considered and I shall make an announcement in due course and in the appropriate way. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are looking into that matter.

In the meantime, so that the House does not think that the Government are not taking the firmest possible action to reassure people, we have been in touch with the funeral trade associations proposing how they should fulfil their contracts and asking them for assurances that funeral directors will honour their contract with the relative or bereaved person in respect of the plan provider. Naturally, the major plan providers are companies of considerable repute. It is important that the funeral director is aware that he or she has a contract with the person who has taken out the plan and that he can recover the money from the plan provider. If that is not the case, I am seeking their confirmation that, in any case, they are obliged to carry out the funeral.

The hon. Gentleman rightly touched on other matters of concern, including marketing practices. I have written to the Advertising Standards Authority asking whether it is taking action to ensure that any or all such advertising fully complies with its code. The hon. Gentleman mentioned a charity. Where plan providers are linked to a charity, I have asked the Charity Commission to advise on whether there is any abuse or malpractice.

The hon. Gentleman raised two specific cases involving Age Concern. I received a letter from Age Concern giving its side of the story. In the first case that he mentioned, the newspaper article suggests that the person was the recipient of an unsolicited mailing. Age Concern tells me that its records show that she responded to an information leaflet about the Age Concern funeral plan carried in *My Weekly*, that she requested a brochure with further information and was telephoned to check whether she required more information. There was no question of a hard sell of a plot and the conversation ended amicably.

In the second case, a different newspaper report suggested that the person had received an unsolicited mailing about a funeral plan shortly after being diagnosed with cancer. I understand that that person was initially mailed as an existing Age Concern insurance customer and subsequently received an information pack about the Age Concern funeral plan. We have been informed by the charity that of course she will not receive any follow-up mailing. Age Concern apologised if she or her family were upset. However, the charity informs me that it has received no direct complaint from the person to whom the hon. Gentleman referred or from her family. The problem that we all face as responsible right hon. and hon. Members and Ministers is that if an hon. Member raises two cases which, for all the sensationalism that there may have been in newspaper reports, do not appear to stand up, it is important—and I urge all hon. Members to do so—either to correct the account that we have received from a highly responsible charity or to provide other cases. My door is never shut to cases of abuse of the nature that was alleged in the newspaper article.

Mr. Chidgey: I certainly endorse what the Minister has said. I have met the chief executive of Age Concern and I know the sincerity of that charity's approach. My point was not in respect of the merits of the cases; I was drawing attention to the fact that, whether or not the publicity was accurate, it still occurred. I am concerned about its effects on the reputation of the charity.

Mr. Griffiths: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern. It would have been helpful if he had drawn attention to the other side of the story—that of Age Concern—as I have done.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to other important matters. There must be transparency in contract terms and trust arrangements. It is vital that the inclusive costs of any funeral and any additional costs are included in the prepayment plan or that any omission is made perfectly clear to those considering taking out the plan so that they can seek a more comprehensive plan or a cheaper plan that is not all-inclusive. Of course we want to ensure that information is available on the fees paid to plan providers.

[Mr. Griffiths]

It is also important that all the aspects that I have raised with the Advertising Standards Authority and the Charity Commission fall within existing, well worked and acceptable codes.

Mr. Chidgey: May I return to a previous point? We have looked at the Minister's proposals for regulation of the providers of pre-paid funeral plans and I am grateful for his answer on that. However, by purchasing a plan from a large organisation, one is inevitably locked into using one of its funeral directors. The issue is whether that limits competition and choice. Is it possible to separate investing in a pre-paid funeral plan from using a particular funeral provider? A national charity may be in a good position to consider whether a funeral director should have to subscribe to certain standards in order to be one of the recommended, preferred or accepted funeral directors able to access a pre-paid plan purchased from a separate or third party. I hope that the Minister can also address my problem in respect of the NHS bereavement services.

Mr. Griffiths: I will do so as soon as I have answered the hon. Gentleman's previous question. As part of the investigation by the Director General of Fair Trading into the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report and the subsequent dealings with one major provider that the hon. Gentleman may have in mind, the director general is responsible for monitoring any undertakings given and a review of the position is about to be undertaken by the director general's officials. There are concerns about transparency in respect of price and ownership. If such concerns persist in the industry, the Director General of Fair Trading will consider whether any other issues need further consideration or study.

The hon. Gentleman raised a valid point about the role of hospitals. A complaint has been lodged in respect of one hospital—the Central Middlesex Hospitals trust—because of its decision to provide mortuary and bereavement services. The Director General of Fair Trading has considered the arrangements under competition legislation, but found no evidence of anti-competitive behaviour, either on the part of the hospital or by the successful contractor, which would justify the use of the director general's competition powers.

As always, however, if further evidence is presented by any aggrieved party, hon. Members or anyone else, the director general will examine the matter afresh. In that respect, and in respect of advertising and marketing reports, it is important to put into perspective what has been done and the action that has been taken by the Government and organisations such as the Office of Fair Trading and to examine all the ramifications and aspects of the issue.

Mr. Chidgey: I commend the Minister's openness in discussing the issue and, as the months go by, I hope to have the opportunity to consider the possibilities of regulation and legislation in more detail, and in a more consultative way, perhaps outside the House.

Mr. Griffiths: Certainly our examination of the issue will not lack detail. I should summarise for the House the steps that we have already taken and where we will go from here.

We have been in touch with the Advertising Standards Authority in writing about alleged abuse by one provider and possible breach of the authority's code. I hope to have the opportunity to report its findings in due course. Likewise, we have been in touch with the Charity Commission about concerns that have been expressed in the House and elsewhere about a commercial arrangement between charities and funeral providers which may not be fully transparent. Of course such an arrangement must be fully transparent, as I am sure that all hon. Members would agree.

We have taken an important step in contacting all the major associations of funeral providers to ensure that they spell out to their members their legal obligations, which may be wider than some hon. Members had thought. As I have said previously, the way ahead is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Burnley Valuation Office

1.30 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise this important issue. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to reconsider the proposal to close Burnley valuation office. I first became concerned about the proposed closure in December 1995; the proposal was first made around May that year. I have become increasingly concerned about the matter this year, partly because the decision was becoming imminent. Indeed, the decision has now been taken and the Burnley office is set to close.

The Burnley valuation office is an important office, which has a staff of about 32 people. It serves my constituency, the borough of Burnley, Blackburn, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley, Rossendale and Pendle—an area of 500,000 people. It serves that area very well and is well respected, but it is due to close in March 1999. Although I shall specifically speak about the Burnley office, I recognise that some of the issues may apply to other proposed closures. I do not know the details of those other cases; I am particularly concerned with the Burnley office.

This morning, I received a fax that informed me that Veronica Lowe, the chief executive officer of the Valuation Office agency, surprisingly announced her resignation on Friday. She had been very much involved in overseeing the proposed changes. That announcement followed another one last week. Mr. Mike Jordan, the director of business resources, announced that he is to take early retirement in March 1998. He has masterminded—if that is the right word—the changes. The name of the programme of changes is Newvos—new valuation offices. Veronica Lowe's resignation was surprising because, only a few months ago, we were dealing with an acting chief executive officer, Mr. Peter Upton, who has since retired. Veronica Lowe had not held the post for all that long before Mr. Upton became the acting chief executive while she was off.

Having dealt with the issue through a fair amount of correspondence—I shall refer to some of it—I do not believe that the case has yet been made for the closure. It is my view that the Minister has been ill advised. Indeed, some people think she may have been misinformed. I felt that it was only right to call this debate to force the issues into the open and allow them to be scrutinised.

In May 1997, Mr. Varley, the then district valuer and valuation officer in Burnley, wrote to Mr. Upton, who was at that time director of operations. Incidentally, Mr. Varley has also retired. He was succeeded for a short time by Mr. Speight and subsequently succeeded by Mr. Borland, who had been the district valuer in Burnley some time previously. All the national and local staff changes are quite puzzling. I mention that particularly, because the way in which the staff are being moved around like pawns must be most disturbing for them and must introduce a certain inconsistency.

In his letter in May, Mr. Varley made a very detailed case for the Burnley office to remain open. He said:

"We were pleased to hear from Mike"—

that is Mike Jordan, to whom I referred—

"that no final decision to close the Burnley office has been taken, and that it is recognised that Burnley is an 'extremely efficient office'. Mike Jordan's express wish that this efficiency be replicated nationwide is an essential element of our own thinking."

Mr. Varley detailed why the Burnley office should remain open under the headings of cost effectiveness, customer service and business development. He said that, due to the 23 miles between Burnley and Preston, travel costs would substantially increase, as would the amount of non-productive time spent on case work. He referred to items such as office rental, which in Burnley is only 50 to 60 per cent. of the cost in Preston. Rents in Preston are higher because it is on the InterCity network and at a major convergence of the motorway network. He also pointed out that car parking is significantly cheaper in Burnley.

Mr. Upton replied on 25 July to the representations that I had made in the interim:

"The proposals for streamlining the Agency network of local valuation offices were detailed . . . in a letter of 19 July 1995"

He said that, on 10 May 1996, the Valuation Office's former chief executive, John Langford—yet another name which has come into the picture—wrote to me in response to the concerns that I had expressed at that stage. Mr. Upton continued:

"No final decision on implementing will be made before the views of all concerned have been carefully considered."

Mr. Upton wrote to me again on 5 September:

"A consensus has been reached with the trades unions representing Valuation Office staff, and . . . will include the merger of the office that covers your constituency with adjoining offices."

That two-page letter does not say what will happen to the Burnley office until appendix B, which I think is a strange way of going about things. The Burnley office will be merged into the Preston office. Preston will become a group office with satellite offices in Lancaster, Carlisle and Ulverston. Those three satellite offices are all in west Lancashire. The Burnley office covers east Lancashire, which is very different. As I said, Burnley is effectively a city of 500,000 people, although it is covered by six different local authorities.

On 25 September, I wrote to Mr. Upton and sent an almost identical letter to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary. I made a number of points in favour of the reconsideration of the case:

"I do not believe closure and moving the office into extra space at Preston will save money. Office space at Preston is *dearer* than in Burnley. I understand staff in Burnley did put forward proposals on how money could be saved. Have these proposals been considered? . . . The service level at present is excellent. I feel it will be worse at Preston. It will certainly be less local and that is contrary to policy aims of the new Government."

On coming into office, the Labour Government stressed the provision of services near the local people, wherever possible. I accept that that is not always possible, but we should aim for it.

My letter continued:

"It will also mean in the long run less job opportunities here"—

in Burnley—

"as the job range is very narrow."

North-east Lancashire, including the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), who is in his place, is heavily dependent on manufacturing jobs. There is nothing wrong with that—indeed, I have worked in manufacturing myself—but we need a wider range of jobs. While the majority of employees of the valuation office will move to Preston, when they retire in future years the jobs will probably be filled by people from the west side of the county, not the east.

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

Burnley borough council's local taxation officer, Michael Frazer, wrote to me to express his concern. The council has pursued the issue for some time. He made an additional point about the impact on local government in east Lancashire, because all the local boroughs felt that they had received excellent service because the office was based in east Lancashire. The council wrote to me again on 13 October to make a further point:

"Consultation is currently taking place about the possibility of a Council Tax revaluation and future revaluations . . . If such revaluation becomes a reality, it appears that the Burnley office would have a crucial role to play in the process."

I then consulted other Members of Parliament in the area. My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle had already expressed concern independently about the proposal and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) have also raised issues arising from the proposed closure. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary wrote to me on 18 November:

"I am generally content with the thrust of the change proposals concerning improved service".

She continued:

"A ballot of the Agency's Trades Union membership has now been conducted and the structure, based on 24 Groups over the country with a total of 85 offices, has been accepted."

In the intervening period, I received several letters from Veronica Lowe and Michael Jordan, all of which I considered unsatisfactory. I wrote back on one occasion to say that I felt that they had responded inappropriately to issues raised by a Member of Parliament. Their letters had dodged questions about costs, which are crucial to the proposed closure of the Burnley office. They were also not prepared to answer questions about how much extra office space would be needed at Preston; what extra costs would be involved; or what the union vote really meant.

The latter question is important, because the union vote has been interpreted wrongly. I have received a letter from the Preston branch—the very office that will become a group office—which stated:

"the overwhelming number of the staff who work here"—

in Preston—

"are appalled that Burnley office is to close down, indeed at a recent ballot on the office closure programme 90 per cent. of staff voted against the proposals."

I then received a letter from a higher level in the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union, Inland Revenue Group, which stated:

"Firstly the trades unions have not accepted the restructuring proposals, the ballot question asked members to 'acknowledge that the new VOA"—

the Valuation Office—

"Group Structure will be implemented', and sought to allow national officials to continue negotiations on the many issues the restructuring has thrown up. That does not constitute acceptance."

The union's claim is that the ballot was about whether—if the restructuring was forced on members—the union should be involved in discussions about what should then happen. It is realistic for the union to say that it wants to be involved, but that does not mean that it can be claimed that the union approves the change that will take place.

Many questions still have not been answered. What are the redundancy costs involved in closure, because some staff will not be able to move? How much new office space will be required in Preston and how much will it cost? What are the implications of additional travel costs? Has the fact that rent will have to be paid in Burnley until 31 December 1999, even though the building will not be used, been taken into account? Is it not a fact that savings of 21.6 per cent. have been made between 1995–96 and that it is planned to save a further 7 per cent. through productivity gains, not including the restructuring proposals?

The chief executive has gone. The person who proposed and masterminded the changes has also announced that he will go. Is not it now time to throw the proposals in the bin, reconsider the situation and decide on the right way forward? Even if other valuation offices must close, there is a good case for the Burnley office, which has provided such good service in the local area for so many years, to stay open to continue to provide that service.

1.46 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): I shall try to answer the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), especially about the trade union, because it needs to make up its mind what it has agreed and what it has not. I shall return to that point later.

My hon. Friend knows the background to the introduction of the new office structure for the Valuation Office. He mentioned staff turnover, and I hope that he will accept my word, as a friend as well as a Minister, when I say that I cannot discuss the specific points that he made about staff. He mentioned the chief executive of the Valuation Office and her decision to resign last week. I can assure him that her resignation is not connected to the Newvos project.

My hon. Friend also referred to the project director and his intention to leave, which is an unconnected personal decision. I understand the point he makes about the apparent turnover of staff, but I assure him that that is not connected with this issue.

Mr. Pike: I have known my hon. Friend for a long time, and I accept 100 per cent. what she says and the spirit in which it was intended. Nevertheless, the changes provide an opportunity for a rethink—although I accept that that change is totally unrelated and has been made for personal reasons.

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend is highlighting what may be the concerns of others, and I hope that my comments will help to calm things down during a difficult time for many members of staff.

I will not go over the background to the reorganisation, as my hon. Friend has—in exchanges of letters over the years—explained the origins of the proposals and their purpose. However, in terms of the Burnley case, he does not accept the purpose, which is to improve the quality and level of service, to make it more flexible, to respond to changing work loads and technologies and to ensure that the agency is well placed and has a firm footing for the future.

I turn to the question of the trade unions and the rethink for which my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley has asked. On my appointment, I met the management of the Valuation Office agency and asked them to reassess the plans on Newvos. I also met the trade unions and heard their comments. I clearly explained to the trade unions the problems with regard to the inherited budgets for the running costs of Departments—of which they were aware—and our manifesto commitment.

I asked the unions and the management to go away, reconsider the proposals and come back with an agreed set of proposals, which they did. A number of offices that were due for closure—regrettably, Burnley was not one of them—were removed from the closure programme, and the number of groups in the structure of the Valuation Office was increased. I concentrated particularly—as my hon. Friend, the management and the unions urged me—on making sure that the Valuation Office was building on its efficiency and had a firm and secure base for its staff. At no point have the unions indicated to me that they are unhappy with the negotiated settlement—in fact, I have been led to believe that the opposite is the case.

I wish to refer to Mr. Peter Upton, who retired from the agency but delayed his retirement because the chief executive was off ill. This was a time of change for the agency and we are grateful for the hard work that Mr. Upton undertook. He wrote to every single employee of the Valuation Office to explain the package that had been agreed. The package was not only about removing some of the offices that were due for closure after the reassessment; it indicated the process that would need to be in place to support staff and to ensure that the change was managed properly so staff did not feel insecure or uncertain about their future.

We all accept that change is difficult, particularly for those who are experiencing it. If my hon. Friend has not seen the letter from Mr. Upton, I will send a copy to him. I hope that he will forgive me for sending him another letter.

There are currently 33 staff in post at the Burnley office, five of whom are part time. All staff have received the location transfer preference form. From the preferences known so far, most of the staff have indicated that they are prepared to transfer to Preston. One has requested a transfer to Halifax, and three to Manchester. Only three have suggested that they could not move to Preston, one of whom has said he would like to be considered for early retirement. I hope that my hon. Friend sees nothing untoward in that request, which I am sure fits in with the member of staff's current life style. It has nothing to do with our forcing him out of the agency. Two others have not specified an alternative, and discussions will have to take place to ensure that their cases are handled properly.

There is enough room in the Preston office to take the staff from Burnley. As my hon. Friend knows, the lease at Burnley is up for renewal. I do not have the exact date to hand, but the lease was due to expire close to the time of the closure programme. There will be minimal redundancies following the move, and the question of the rent at Preston has been dealt with.

Mr. Pike: I have been told by people not only from the Burnley office but from the Preston office that there is not enough room to fit in the 30-odd staff.

Dawn Primarolo: This matter will not be resolved between my hon. Friend and me, because my information is that there is enough space. I will write to him, and his point is on the record. I shall seek clarification.

On the question of travelling costs, the staff are mobile. I do not know where they all live, as opposed to where they work. If that information is available, my hon. Friend Burnley will receive an explanation. The decision on the Burnley office was based on questions of accessibility and future development in terms of changing work patterns of the Valuation Office. In addition, the recently opened M65 motorway, which links Burnley with Blackburn in east Lancashire to both the M6 and the M61, will significantly improve communication links.

I can assure my hon. Friend that I have looked closely at the issue and we have considered the decisions made since the election. The questions of efficiency, the service to the local area and the costs have been satisfied by the proposals which have been agreed within the budgets that the three groups for which I am the responsible Minister—revenue, customs and the Valuation Office—have to continue to meet.

Having talked to the unions, my understanding is that they accept the agreement, and they entered the discussion on how best to deal with the proposals. They were not press ganged into it. They did so in order to reach agreement—otherwise, they would still be arguing. I accept that some local offices may not agree, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would send me a copy of the letter he has from the PTC. So that we can make plans, some clarification may be required about whether it holds constant views.

I regret to say that I do not think there is a case for reopening the decision on the Burnley closure, which will take effect in spring 1999. I accept, and I have impressed on the management of the Valuation Office, that it is crucial to support the staff so that they feel secure and we have better services at the end of the process. I undertake to respond to any questions to which my hon. Friend feels he has not received an adequate answer. It was right for him to bring the debate to the House today, and I hope at least that I have explained what we have done.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

The Chancellor was asked—

Food Standards Agency

1. **Mr. Fabricant:** What representations he has received on his proposals for a food standards agency. [19600]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): As chairman of the relevant ministerial committee, I have received representations from a wide range of bodies, from consumer organisations to food manufacturers. There is clear agreement on the need for reform and strong support for the establishment of a food standards agency.

Mr. Fabricant: Following the debacle over the beef-on-the-bone crisis, in which confusion has been piled on confusion, and given that the Government have been unable to enforce the ban, what difference will a food standards agency make?

Dr. Clark: It ill becomes of member of the Conservative party, which presided over food scare after food scare, including salmonella, BSE and E. coli, to lecture the House on the work of a food standards agency. If we had had such an agency, the loss of confidence that the British people have experienced in our very fine food industry might well have been averted.

Mr. Barnes: Was not the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food considered under the previous Government to be in hock to the producers at the expense of consumer interests? Is not the food standards agency an arrangement whereby the rights of consumers can be fully considered? What is the likely relationship between my right hon. Friend's Department and MAFF? Will there be a division of authority, or will there be co-ordination?

Dr. Clark: When the food standards agency is established, through the House, we will transfer ministerial responsibility for it from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Department of Health, but we envisage the agency as an autonomous body, able to get the very best scientific advice and to act in a completely independent manner to try to restore public confidence in the quality of the food that the British people eat.

Mr. Tyler: Has the Minister seen the series of important articles in *The Guardian* over recent days, about the food revolution, and specifically about genetically modified foodstuffs and organisms? Can he give me a double assurance: first, that the new food standards agency will have as part of its remit consideration of those extremely important issues, as all hon. Members, and the public generally, are concerned about the extent to which we have mechanisms to ensure the long-term safety of such genetic engineering; and, secondly, that before we get the new agency someone in Government will take an holistic view of the problems, and will take a responsible attitude and be accountable to the House?

Dr. Clark: I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance on both questions. The committee that I chair realised that it would be some time before we had a food standards agency in place and we were determined to ensure in the interim that we had a sensible arrangement to try to deal with food issues. We have brought together under one chain of command the food scientists and the food experts from the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, so an holistic view is, indeed, being taken on such issues. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that issues such as novel foods will fall within the remit of the food standards agency.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Minister agree that had we had a food standards agency, the BSE problem would not have arisen in the way that it did? Does my right hon. Friend agree that a public inquiry into the BSE crisis would be helpful under the forthcoming freedom of information Act?

Dr. Clark: I believe that if we had had a freedom of information Act, the House and other experts might have been able to have access to information that might have allowed us to avert the terrible BSE disaster. I hope that, in the near future, we will be in a position to announce an inquiry into the BSE affair.

Mr. Maclennan: Is it the right hon. Gentleman's intention that the food standards agency should take the sort of decisions that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food took in banning beef on the bone, or would it be an advisory body, leaving the public to form their own conclusions about the facts put before them?

Dr. Clark: Ministers have to follow the best scientific advice they are given. Their first priority is the protection of the consumer. The food standards agency would be an independent body. It would have access to the finest scientific and other advice. It would make recommendations to the House because, clearly, only the House has the power to legislate should that be needed. It would be a brave Minister who went against the advice of such an august body.

Freedom of Information

2. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** If he will make a statement on the extension of the principle of open government. [19601]

Dr. David Clark: My proposals for a freedom of information Act, set out in the White Paper "Your Right to Know", would transform government in this country from a culture of secrecy to a culture of openness.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to transform this Government from a culture of secrecy to a culture of openness. In that vein, will he consider the role of the Paymaster General in government, now that the hon. Gentleman has been given a role in considering closing the loopholes in offshore trusts when he has numerous offshore trusts and benefits

from them financially? Will the right hon. Gentleman consider that conflicting role, given that the Paymaster General's solicitors have denied that he has control of the Orion trust yet he is able to influence that trust in relation to what shares are bought? Surely, in the interests of open government, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster should now require the Paymaster General to make a personal statement to the House so that these matters can be cleared up once and for all.

Dr. Clark: The Paymaster General abided by all the rules of ministerial conduct. He took advice from Her Majesty's Treasury, which he then followed.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the publication of the freedom of information White Paper "Your Right to Know" is an extremely important event in open government? Does he further agree that that contrasts directly with the attitude of the previous Administration who did not believe in freedom, except for the favoured few—and who certainly did not believe in information because they presided over the most centralised and secretive Government in living memory?

Dr. Clark: The Government believe that, in a modern democracy, the citizens should have a presumption of access to information held by public bodies unless there are very good reasons why they should not have that access.

Mrs. Shephard: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, last week we supported his proposals for more open government. In the light of his statement last week, can he explain to the House why, if the previous Government were able to calculate and make public the effect on employment of different levels of a national minimum wage, his Government, committed as he said last week to more open government, refuse to do so?

Dr. Clark: We debated that issue very fully in the House yesterday evening. Right hon. and hon. Members can raise other points in Committee.

3. **Fiona Mactaggart:** What steps he has taken to make his Department more open. [19602]

Dr. David Clark: I have published a White Paper on freedom of information which will open up not only my Department but the whole of government and public service. I intend that my Department will set an example on openness. I have therefore undertaken to publish the background material relevant to the formation of the White Paper's proposals.

Fiona Mactaggart: I welcome my right hon. Friend's response and the openness that he has shown by publishing background material on that and on the millennium question. Does he agree that, before his proposals on open government and the reform of quangos take effect, public bodies have the opportunity to be more open and to release more information as a matter of course, as he has shown? What steps can he take to ensure that that happens?

Dr. Clark: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that public bodies become much more proactive in releasing information. We must practise what we preach on open government. When I announced our assessment of how Departments were dealing with the millennium problem, I published all the reports on the work being done, some 1,200 pages. The internet is also a useful tool in lifting the lid on secrecy. There is no reason why more information should not be put on the net. I was pleased that when we published the freedom of information White Paper, we included for the first time a reference to a debate on the consultation documents relating to it, which are running on the internet.

Mr. Evans: Does the right hon. Gentleman's commitment to open government extend to leak inquiries? Does he believe that the public have a right to know who is being questioned in leak inquiries, particularly when that may involve Ministers and their answers to questions?

Dr. Clark: There is a long agreed system for inquiries into leaks. That will continue, as it has continued over many years.

Mr. Llew Smith: When my right hon. Friend launched his freedom of information proposals last week, he said that they would cover the commercial activities of British Nuclear Fuels plc, but a reply from the Minister for Transport in London says that details of future plans to transport plutonium fuel

"are a commercial matter for BNFL."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1997; Vol. 303, c. *156*.]

Can my right hon. Friend say who is correct?

Dr. Clark: We have not excluded BNFL from the scope of the White Paper. Obviously, any information requested from BNFL would be subject to the same substantial harm test as applications to any other body within the scope of the Act.

Mr. Gorrie: In his good work of trying to create more open government, will the right hon. Gentleman consider making the access of hon. Members to civil servants' information simpler so that we do not have to go through the tortuous route of devising questions, which wastes much more of people's time? In local government, the right of each councillor to access to officials works well. Would he, in a sensible manner, allow that to happen with civil servants?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point, with which I have considerable sympathy. I am well aware that many hon. Members feel that the relationship between them and officials in central government is different from their experience in local government. We can learn much from local government. I accept that there are difficulties on issues such as ministerial responsibilities, but I believe that we should work towards making purely factual information from civil servants much more available to hon. Members. I emphasise that we must bear in mind the fact that civil servants are responsible to Ministers, who act as their spokesmen.

Citizens Charter

4. **Mr. Bayley:** If he will make a statement about the most recent recipients of charter mark awards. [19603]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): This has been a very successful year for the charter mark awards scheme, with 365 awards being made—the highest number ever. There were record numbers of applications from virtually all types of public service, including a successful one from the Benefits Agency in York and the North Yorkshire guidance service, which serves York. York is, of course, the original home of the citizens charter idea.

The charter mark is making a real contribution to improving public services and we intend to build on that success by developing it and making it more effective.

Mr. Bayley: I thank my hon. Friend for his recognition of the fact that it was a Labour city council that invented the citizens charter. Will he join me in paying tribute to the staff of the Benefits Agency office in York who won a charter mark? Does he agree that staff in Benefits Agency offices are under a lot of pressure, because when people are poor and without money they get desperate and pushy in those offices? If staff at a Benefits Agency office have won an award for excellence in public service for dealing sympathetically and well with people in such circumstances, they deserve praise. Does my hon. Friend agree that their excellent standards deserve to be spread throughout the Benefits Agency so that all people in need get the service that they deserve?

Mr. Kilfoyle: My hon. Friend will be aware that a successful charter mark award ceremony held a fortnight ago last Monday was attended by nearly 100 Members and represented a recognition of the real achievements of those at the sharp end. That is why we are trying to cater for a charter programme that works according to a bottom-up approach to public services rather than opting for the policy of the Conservatives, who tried to impose their will on those who had the extremely difficult job of delivering services in difficult circumstances.

Freedom of Information

5. **Mr. Canavan:** If he will make a statement about progress with legislation for freedom of information. [19604]

7. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** If he will make a statement on progress towards legislation on freedom of information. [19607]

Dr. David Clark: The White Paper "Your Right to Know" sets out the Government's clear and radical proposals for freedom of information. We now invite comment and debate. In the light of that, I will publish a draft freedom of information Bill in the new year.

Mr. Canavan: Although there will be a general welcome for the White Paper, why should there be a blanket exemption for the security and intelligence services and on information relating to the arms trade and the advice that Ministers receive from civil servants and policy advisers? Would it not be better to allow the commissioner or some form of independent panel to decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not it is in the public interest to conceal such information?

Dr. Clark: I believe that we have produced a radical White Paper which will roll back secrecy in public bodies across the country. The Campaign for Freedom of Information welcomed the proposals, which it said went further than it expected any British Government would ever go. We must set a new balance between disclosure and confidentiality, which is firmly weighted towards openness; there is, and needs to be, a balance.

As for the intelligence services, I must tell my hon. Friend that I am determined not to jeopardise national security. That is why that exclusion has been set out so openly and honestly. As regards detailed policy advice to Ministers, we believe that in a modern society the Government need space in which to do their business. That is why we have established a simple harm test in that case, but we have made it clear that factual and background information, which is given to Ministers as they form their opinions, should be made available.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I welcome the radical proposals in the White Paper. Is it not the case that my constituents, and many ordinary people, will benefit from them because they will have the right to access information about themselves?

Dr. Clark: Yes. In drawing up the White Paper, I tried to look at it not through the eyes of big business or the press but through those of the ordinary citizen. That is why it is clear, simple and straightforward. I want to get the message across loud and clear that the information is for the people, and for them first and foremost. That is why we have sought to minimise the cost and to make the system easier.

As well as publishing the White Paper in print and on the internet, we are distributing 40,000 copies of a leaflet explaining the main proposals. That leaflet is straightforward and will be available in seven minority languages, in large print, in Braille and on audio cassette.

Mr. Ruffley: In view of the Minister's commitment to open government, will he tell the House whether the leak inquiry that he appointed last week has personally interviewed the Minister without Portfolio about the disgraceful leaking of the contents of the White Paper earlier last week? It is a simple question—yes or no?

Dr. Clark: There is a procedure for that sort of inquiry. I have handed it over to my permanent secretary, and it is not the job of a Minister to interfere with an independent neutral civil servant and tell him how to do his job.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply, but will he say a little more about the progress of the inquiry? He knows that I would not for a moment doubt his personal integrity, but is he completely satisfied that no ministerial colleague was involved in the leak last week?

Dr. Clark: My permanent secretary, whom I requested to look into the leak, is doing so, and is conducting a wide range of interviews. He has done that, and is still doing the work. It would be premature for me at this stage to give any disclosure of what conclusion he has come to. It would certainly be wrong for me to interfere in any way with his inquiries.

Service Delivery (Technology)

6. **Mr. Rooney:** What pilot projects are currently under way to develop the technology used in delivering Government services. [19606]

Dr. David Clark: There are currently five such pilot projects. Those are the intelligent form project, a joint working programme on touch-screen kiosks, a service electronically delivering geographical data, a rural sub-post office touch-screen kiosk, and an electronic delivery of land and property information in Stirlingshire.

Mr. Rooney: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He will know that I am a technological imbecile, and that many customers of the Government do not have the skills to deal with such technology. What efforts have been made to make it user-friendly?

Dr. Clark: It is important that we ensure that the technology that we are using is simple, straightforward and varied. That is why we are encouraging pilot schemes throughout the country at both central and local level. When we talk about technology, that includes forms of technology that even my hon. Friend can use to great effect, such as the telephone and the television. Digital television will be introduced next year, and the possibility of interaction through television screens by the use of a console means that many people will find new technology well within their grasp.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

8. **Mr. Terry Lewis:** What action he has taken to increase the accountability of non-departmental public bodies. [19608]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government are determined to ensure that quangos are made more open and accountable. In the consultation paper "Opening up Quangos", published on 11 November, we set out a number of proposals to do so. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced on the same day the publication of "Executive Non-departmental Public Bodies: 1997 Report", which is a clear signal of the Government's determination to make executive NDPBs more transparent, accessible and accountable to the taxpayer.

Mr. Lewis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but in the quest for greater transparency, will he ensure that quangos open their doors more to the public? Perhaps a Select Committee would be an appropriate way of overseeing and supervising the quangocracy.

Mr. Kilfoyle: We intend to make the quangos more accountable to Parliament, as well as to the general public. We shall do that through a number of measures, including perhaps extending the remit of Select Committees—that is in the consultation paper. Also, for the ordinary citizen, we want to ensure that each body publishes an annual report and a summary of its meetings, and, where practicable, has open meetings to which the general public are invited.

Magistrates (County Palatine)

9. **Mr. Pike:** What representations he has received regarding the appointment of magistrates in the County Palatine. [19609]

Dr. David Clark: During a visit to Lancashire earlier this autumn, I had discussions with the chairmen of the five advisory sub-committees, lieutenancy staff, the chairman and justices chief executive of the magistrates courts committee and the chairman of the Lancaster bench regarding the appointment of magistrates. I have also corresponded with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) regarding the balance of the St. Helens bench.

Mr. Pike: Does my right hon. Friend accept that magistrates benches in Lancashire are becoming less representative of the areas that they serve? How can we ensure that more Labour people and more working people are appointed as magistrates, so that magistrates benches better reflect the population of the areas that they serve?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend raises a serious point. I am concerned that the balance was lost under the previous Government. For example, fewer than 5 per cent. of the local councillors in Burnley and Pendle are Conservatives, whereas there are almost as many Tory magistrates on the local magistrates benches as there are Labour and Liberal Democrat magistrates put together.

The guidance on the appointment of magistrates is clear. On political affiliations, it says:

"It is important that justices should be drawn, and should be known to be drawn, from all sections of the community, and should reflect all shades of responsible opinion."

To try to open up the magistracy, we have raised the age limit on first appointment from 55 to 65. We want to attract many of the people who have taken early retirement, and whose great experience could be well used on the various benches in Lancashire and elsewhere.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Does the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster accept that he, like the Lord Chancellor, can appoint only those people who apply to be magistrates? If Labour Members think that not enough Labour people apply to the justices bench, the remedy lies in their own hands.

Dr. Clark: We accept the need for a better political balance on magistrates benches throughout the United Kingdom, in compliance with the directions of the law of the land. The situation is out of kilter. The total number of Labour and Liberal Democrat magistrates for the St. Helens bench only equals the number of Conservative magistrates, in spite of the fact that the ratio of local councillors is 44 Labour to one Conservative. The problem is that not enough names are being put forward.

Madam Speaker: Order. I should be obliged if the House would come to order. Conversations are much too noisy, and it is impossible to hear the Minister.

Service Delivery (Technology)

10. **Mr. Timms:** If he will list the transactions with Government which will be capable of being undertaken electronically in the first stage of his programme. [19610]

Dr. David Clark: I am aware of the good work being done by the Newham advice arcade, and the work that is being done with the touch-screen kiosk in that area. Much good work is being done at local level throughout the country. I chair the central-local partnership ministerial group on public services and public service delivery, whose aim is to learn as much as possible from those projects. We intend to conduct an audit and an assessment of what is being done to spread the best practice in electronic service across the country.

Mr. Timms: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is not the problem that little progress was made in this area under the previous Government? We had to depend on local initiatives to make the running in the electronic delivery of services. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the Government have a lot to learn from what has already been achieved at local level?

Dr. Clark: Generally, and especially in the field of information technology, central Government can learn a great deal from our local government cousins. Last week, I launched an intelligent form for the electronic notification of self-employment. One form filled in electronically will be dispatched instantaneously to three separate Government Departments. That will replace paper access, which at times required up to 14 forms, and which accounted for a vast number of errors, often reaching a rate of 40 per cent.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

11. **Mr. Steinberg:** What measures he is taking to broaden the social background from which appointments to non-departmental public bodies are made. [19611]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government are committed to attracting a broad range of applicants for public appointments by the use of advertising and by encouraging members of under-represented groups to nominate themselves for the central and departmental lists of candidates.

Mr. Steinberg: Does my hon. Friend agree that the previous Government staffed quangos with Tory party members or supporters? For example, in my constituency not one Tory candidate has been elected to any public body, whether to a county council, district council or parish council, yet the quangos contain an unrepresentative number of Tories. Will he ensure that in future there is a social and political mix on quangos so that people in my area can feel confident that they are being properly represented?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that the Government intend to ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit, reflecting the skills that are needed and the interests of all stakeholders in our society, rather than on the basis of a partial approach to those appointments.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [19630] **Mr. McNulty:** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. McNulty: Has my right hon. Friend seen the letter from Sir Patrick Neill's inquiry to the treasurers of all political parties which asks all parties to supply information from 1992, from home and abroad, on all donations and from whom they come? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Labour party complies with that request? *[Interruption.]* I shall let the children settle down. Will my right hon. Friend exhort all other party leaders to do the same because if they do not, people will rightly ask, "What have the Tories got to hide?"

The Prime Minister: We welcome the consultation document that was published today by the committee on party funding. It is obviously important that, to do their job properly, the members of the committee should have all the information that they need. They have written to all parties requesting information about party income going back to 1992. That is entirely right. Speaking for the Labour party, I can say that we shall provide them exactly with the information that they require and I hope that all other parties will do the same.

Mr. Hague: Speaking for the Conservative party, I can say that we shall provide the Neill committee with all the information that it has asked for. As he raised it, I wonder if the Prime Minister has read the whole of what the Neill committee issued today. On the first page there is a section entitled "Honesty" which states:

> "Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest."

Since the new code of conduct for Ministers, which was drawn up by the Prime Minister, states that Ministers should remain entirely detached from Government decisions that could affect their private interests, is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that the Paymaster General is entirely detached from decisions that could affect his private interests?

The Prime Minister: First, if I may, I should like to unite the House by offering our heartiest congratulations to the right hon. Gentleman on the celebration on Friday of his wedding. On behalf of us all, I wish him and his fiancée a very happy married life thereafter. Now I shall turn to his question. The answer quite simply is yes: I am satisfied of that.

Mr. Hague: On the first part of his answer, I thank the Prime Minister for his kind words. They give me the opportunity to thank hon. Members in all parts of the House who have been so kind to my fiancée and to me. I am delighted that you, Madam Speaker, will be joining

us at our wedding. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] I hope that you will not be required to call for order on that occasion. The Prime Minister will forgive me for suggesting that just as his honeymoon is coming to an end mine is about to begin.

On the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's answer, with which I was not quite so happy, normal hostilities will now resume. Treasury officials have admitted that the Paymaster General has been working on the law relating to offshore trusts. The Paymaster General has £12 million in offshore trusts. The Paymaster General has admitted to having influence over those trusts. By what twist of logic has the Prime Minister come to be satisfied that the Paymaster General is entirely detached from Government decisions on these matters?

The Prime Minister: First—not to carry on the discussion too long—the marriage that the Labour party enjoyed with the electorate is one that we intend to continue at the next election.

In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question, my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has followed the advice of the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and has acted at all times in line with the ministerial code.

Mr. Hague: I have no doubt that advice has been taken, but look what the Paymaster General himself has said. He told journalists on Saturday that he had been working on policy which affected his own financial interests—he even told journalists that he could show them internal Treasury documents about it, which is an interesting admission in itself. That is what he said. How can that be squared with being entirely detached from Government decisions that affect him? Is it not time that the Paymaster General did the honourable thing and resigned?

The Prime Minister: No is the answer to that. There is a clear ministerial code and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has followed that ministerial code. I think that it is good that we have people who are highly successful business people and who have come to work for the Government. My hon. Friend is doing an excellent job for the country, without even taking a ministerial salary.

Mr. Hague: I think that that is good, but the Paymaster General is not an entrepreneur who has just been tempted into the Government; he has been a Labour Member of Parliament for 21 years. We have now established that the Prime Minister, almost alone among people who have considered these matters, does not think that there is a conflict of interest. Does he at least agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, who said that the Paymaster General had said one thing and done another? If a conflict of interest is not a resigning matter in this Government, is gross hypocrisy a resigning matter in this Government?

The Prime Minister: No, that is not correct—*[Interruption.]* That is not correct, either in relation to what my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is supposed to have said, or in relation to the point at issue.

Mr. Hague: What we have here is a Paymaster General who has put a new tax on middle-income savers, but has millions of pounds in an offshore tax haven; who has denied influencing his trust, but then admitted doing so; and who has claimed no conflict of interest, but has then admitted working on offshore tax policy. Are not taxpayers throughout the country going to be appalled if he remains in office as Paymaster General, collecting their taxes? Is it not time, not only for him to become entirely detached from ministerial consideration of his own interests, but for him to become entirely detached from ministerial office itself?

The Prime Minister: The short answer to that is no. I do not accept that at all. In case anyone is interested in the facts, my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has not avoided UK tax—he has paid probably more UK tax than either me or the Leader of the Opposition, as a matter of fact. He is a highly successful business man, he has contributed a lot to public life and he is working without a ministerial salary. I personally think that it would be very unfortunate if people who are successful in business were put off or discouraged from joining a Government and working in the public interest. I do not intend to have people so discouraged.

Q2. [19631] **Mr. Donald Anderson:** One of the many election promises that have been delivered by the Government is to have a referendum which has paved the way for a national assembly for Wales. In conformity with the spirit of Christmas and in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister bring tidings of comfort and joy to the people of Swansea by selecting Swansea guildhall as the site for the new Welsh Assembly, which is cost effective, which is an all-Wales solution, and which will be received enthusiastically by the people of Swansea and south-west Wales?

The Prime Minister: I do not want to promise my hon. Friend a bleak midwinter, but, quite honestly, I have to say that there is a decision to be taken, a review is under way as to the best site for the assembly and it is probably sensible that I wait for the outcome of that review.

Mr. Ashdown: In any end-of-year report on the Government, "Made good progress in some areas that they promised they would", could be a fair judgment; but, "Must do better next year", would be the right judgment in other areas. In which areas does the Prime Minister think that the Government can and must do better next year?

The Prime Minister: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that we have put through a Bill to cut class sizes for all five, six and seven-year-olds, which we promised to do; we have put in place the £1.3 billion schools building programme, which we promised to do; we have provided extra money for the national health service over and above what we promised to do; we have initiated a £3.5 billion welfare-to-work programme; we have put through a Bill for the removal of handguns; we have signed the land mines treaty; we have held referendums in Scotland and Wales; we have provided £50 for the poorest pensioners; we have reduced VAT on fuel; and just today we have announced better treatment for cervical cancer screening and help for the homeless. There is lots of good news.

Can we do more next year? Yes, of course we can, especially on waiting lists and class sizes. We will do more. We were not elected for just seven months; we were

elected for longer than that. We will do more and we can achieve more. As for the right hon. Gentleman's end-of-year report—*[Interruption.]* Well, it is Christmas.

Mr. Ashdown: Indeed, and I do not want to break the spirit of Christmas. I fully understand the mess that the Prime Minister was left by the previous Government. I also fully understand that the right hon. Gentleman cannot do everything at once. However, I remind him of his early pledges to cut waiting lists—they are now at record levels and rising; to reduce class sizes—they are now at a seven-year high and rising; and to increase the number of police on the beat—now 300 fewer than when the right hon. Gentleman was elected.

If, by the time of the next Budget, there are still no improvements in delivering those early pledges, will the Prime Minister at least consider that what may be wrong is not so much his policies, as his decision to enact the spending cuts of the Government whom Labour replaced?

The Prime Minister: I accept, of course, that there is more to do on waiting lists and class sizes. That is precisely what I said earlier and it is why extra money is going to those areas next year. We will put in the extra investment, and along with that will come the reform programme to improve both the health service and schools. However, that will be done against the background of a need to keep a tight rein on public resources. That is right, sensible and prudent. It is best for the long-term future of the country.

Since the election, we have taken difficult decisions on interest rates and public finances, but they are right for the long term. However difficult they may be in the short term, it is right that we put in place the stability that will guarantee investment and security for our people long term. That is what we were elected to do.

Q3. [19632] **Mr. Bill Michie:** May I take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend and the Government for their far-sighted and historic decision to site the National Sports Institute in Sheffield? I am sure that it will be a tremendous boost to athletes throughout the United Kingdom and will be a great success.

On a different but just as important a point, will my right hon. Friend give the necessary support to the British Aerospace Airbus 340-500/600 programmes, to ensure that United Kingdom industry is working on a level playing field with our European partners?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's first point, of course we are delighted that the Sheffield bid was successful. Our aim is to increase the excellence in British sport. In fact, there were superb bids all round from many parts of the country, but obviously the institute can be sited in only one of them.

On my hon. Friend's point about launch aid and British Aerospace, we strongly support the Airbus project; we always have. Obviously, the launch aid application has to be judged on the same criteria as everything else. It is under active consideration and as soon as we have the results we will publish them.

Mr. Salmond: Can the Prime Minister explain to my constituents why four Peterhead families were left, in their bereavement, to raise the funds required to raise the fishing boat Sapphire, return it to Peterhead and allow their loved ones to have family funerals? Does the Prime Minister detect no sense of public obligation or duty in such matters? If he does, can he explain why no Minister, Government Department or agency lifted a finger to help those families in that extreme position?

The Prime Minister: First, I should say that there were Ministers and officials who were in close touch with people throughout the course of this matter. A decision had to be taken. They considered very carefully the report that was commissioned, but they came to the view that the best decision was to leave the situation as it was. I understand the distress that that caused many of the families and it was a difficult decision, but we took it genuinely believing that it was in the best interests of everyone.

Q4. [19633] **Mr. Eric Clarke:** May I congratulate the Prime Minister and the Government on their interim policies on the coal industry, but does he agree that this country needs a national integrated energy and fuel policy because, if we leave it to the laissez-faire market, we will rue the day—we will lose the independence that we have in this country?

The Prime Minister: I say to my hon. Friend, who has long experience in the mining industry, that it is important that we address our energy needs on a long-term basis. Obviously, I am pleased that the generators and RJB Mining have come to an agreement for the short term. That has been done, incidentally, without any Government subsidy being paid at all—it is important to emphasise that. However, we need to use this period to conduct a proper review of what the long-term energy needs of the country are. All I would say is that the review has to be based on long-term energy needs, but that must not become an excuse for not having a highly competitive industry at the same time. Putting those two things together will be the purpose of the review that we are conducting.

Q5. [19634] **Mr. Green:** The Prime Minister has already made it clear this afternoon that he sympathises with the Paymaster General's plaintive question, "What have I done wrong?" Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that a Minister who one weekend issues a statement through his solicitors saying that he has no influence over a trust, and within seven days admits that, on two separate occasions, he directly influenced the actions of that trust, is not fit to command public confidence? Why is the Prime Minister clinging to that Minister, who is doing nothing but sullying the reputation of his Government?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier to the Leader of the Opposition, I simply do not agree with that. Indeed, as has been accepted by Conservative Members throughout, there is not even the allegation that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has done something improper. Therefore, the answer that I gave to the Leader of the Opposition is the same answer that I give to the hon. Gentleman.

Q6. [19635] **Mr. Wareing:** Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the British people were asked to choose between spending more money on building the

millennium dome or on providing proper benefits for disabled people and to provide for the windchill factor in severe weather payments, the British people would choose the latter?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to the windchill payments, the money that has been announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the pre-Budget statement is far greater than anything that could possibly be given through taking the windchill factor into account, where the sums of money involved are extremely small. From recollection, we acted on the advisory body's view that that was not the right way in which to help people who face difficulty with their heating bills. Secondly, in respect of the millennium experience, I simply ask him to study carefully today's report from the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which endorses the Government's decision to proceed with the dome and describes it as both

"magnificent in conception and likely to be breathtaking in execution".

It was the right decision to proceed with that. The previous Government began the process. We have taken it on. It is right. These things are always difficult, but, in 2000, people will see that the right decision has been taken.

Q7. [19636] **Mr. Flight:** Does the Prime Minister regret the lack of consideration given to the proposals for individual savings accounts and the way they were handled? Does he realise the fierce resentment that he has aroused in middle England, not only because the playing field has been changed but because people in middle England who have completed their tax planning will be hit with a £50,000 limit? *[Laughter.]* Labour Members may laugh, but middle England's fury towards the Government is considerable. Does the Prime Minister realise that it will be impossible to regulate individual savings accounts because they fall into three different areas and, as all regulators will tell him, there cannot be three different financial products in one? Does the Prime Minister further realise that ISAs offer nothing to the lower income groups that was not available through personal equity plans and tax-efficient special savings accounts? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurry up."] Will the Government reconsider their proposals and the Minister responsible for them?

The Prime Minister: First, the proposals amount to £50,000 worth of tax-free saving for an individual, and £100,000 for a couple. These are quite significant sums of money. First, just to correct the hon. Gentleman on two points, that is the amount of money that people can pay into the fund; it is not necessarily the value of the fund, which can rise to far more than that. Secondly, the proposals are not retrospective, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

As for the lower income groups, it is estimated that around 6 million more people could get the chance to save. The hon. Gentleman talked as though ISAs were a bad deal for TESSA holders. There are 4.5 million TESSA holders, but the limit on TESSAs is £9,000 and the money has to be tied up for a considerable period. Under our proposals, the sum can rise to £50,000 and the money can be withdrawn at will. There is also an ability to put cash in, too. I suggest that that is rather a good deal for low-income savers.

Q8. [19637] **Mr. McAllion:** On the eve of the publication of the Scotland Bill, I warmly welcome the imminent return of Scotland's Parliament and, with it, political decision making, to Scotland. In that devolutionary spirit, will my right hon. Friend confirm that control over the £450 million tax-raising power will be vested in the Scottish Parliament, and in the Scottish Parliament alone? Will he also confirm that, despite a certain rival claim to sovereignty, we on this side of the House, as good democrats and even better socialists, acknowledge that ultimately sovereignty can rest in only one place—with the people?

The Prime Minister: Of course sovereignty does rest with the people, which is why we gave them the chance to vote in a referendum in Scotland, which personally I always thought was a good idea. As for the Bill that is to be published tomorrow, it will set out the correct position in relation to the tax-varying powers and everything else. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Parliament will come about and that, as a result, we will get a better, more decentralised constitution fit for the 21st century.

Q9. [19638] **Mr. Gibb:** In a written answer, the Chancellor referred to statements issued by the Paymaster General. To one such statement, the Paymaster General attached a copy of his solicitor's letter to *The Observer*. It stated that the trustees of the Orion trust were not influenced by the Paymaster General. Given that it is now abundantly clear that the Paymaster General does influence the trustees of the Orion trust, has not the Chancellor unintentionally misled the House, and does the Prime Minister agree that the Chancellor is duty bound to come to the House to put the record straight?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not agree on any count. As I pointed out earlier, it is simply incorrect to say that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General sought to avoid UK tax. He has not, so the basis of the allegation that is being made is completely and totally wrong. It has been wrong from the beginning and remains wrong now.

Kali Mountford: My right hon. Friend will not be aware that my doctor has told me that many parts of my constituency are practically under quarantine because of a dreadful flu virus that often causes problems in terms of NHS beds. Is not the best Christmas present that the NHS could have had the injection of money that it has received, so that this winter we will not have the crisis that we experienced every year under the previous Government?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in pointing out what those extra resources—an extra £300 million over and above what was promised by the previous Government—will do for the national health service. Yesterday, in a hospital, I saw for myself how £270,000 is being used to bridge the gap between social services and hospital treatment of the elderly, which will relieve some of the pressure on beds. Precisely that type of measure can be introduced because of the extra money. If a problem remains in the national health service, we will—over time, and in the manner that we have set

out—get it cured. We will be reversing the appalling destructive legacy that we were left by the previous Conservative Government.

Q10. [19639] **Mr. Whittingdale:** The Prime Minister has still not answered the question. Is he aware that the statement in the letter of the Paymaster General's lawyers that he has no influence in any way over the decisions of the Orion trust has now been clearly shown to be untrue? Does he therefore accept that the Paymaster General's credibility is destroyed, and that he should now resign?

The Prime Minister: No, as I have already said, I do not accept that. The question may be the Tory briefing of the day, but I have already set out the position absolutely clearly. My hon. Friend has followed the advice that he was given by the Treasury and is in the ministerial code. He has not avoided United Kingdom tax. That is the position.

Q11. [19640] **Mr. Cranston:** May I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Government on their agenda on constitutional change, and particularly on the White Paper on freedom of information? Does he agree that, in five years' time, the British people will say, "Yes, this is another matter on which a Labour Government have made a difference—in this case, in favour of openness and accountability"?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—*[Interruption.]* It is remarkable that, whenever someone mentions the health service or raises other issues that concern the people of this country, Opposition Members have absolutely nothing to say. My hon. Friend is quite right on his point about freedom of information.

Q12. [19641] **Mr. Prior:** May I ask the Prime Minister, for the third time, to answer the question? On 8 December, the Paymaster General issued a statement—which was confirmed, on 12 December, by the Chancellor of the Exchequer—that he did not in any way influence the trustees of the Orion trust. Over the weekend, the Paymaster General reversed that statement. Should the Paymaster General not now ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he might come to the House to clarify the position?

The Prime Minister: The answer is no.

Mrs. Ellman: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Economic and Social Research Council is recommending a change in the categorisation of British society, to include, for the very first time, "the underclass" as an official category? Does he think that that is not only a very suitable epitaph for 18 years of Tory rule, but a measure of the enormity of the task facing the new Labour Government?

The Prime Minister: That is correct, of course—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members shout boring, but I do not think that it is boring to try to tackle some of the social problems that we have in this country. The essence of what we are doing is providing—next year, through our £3.5 billion programme—real opportunity for our young people and the long-term unemployed, but demanding responsibility in return. As has been shown again today, in an initiative on those who are sleeping rough in the streets of London, it is possible to take action if the political will is there to do it. It was not there under the previous Government—that was to their shame—but it is with this Government.

Q13. [19642] **Mr. Walter:** Perhaps I can provide a little relief to the Prime Minister and not ask him about the opinions of the permanent secretary or legal advice to the Paymaster General. I ask instead for his view on whether it is not both incompatible and hypocritical for a Minister to propose a tax shelter for ordinary citizens that is limited to £50,000 while simultaneously having for himself a tax shelter of £12 million?

The Prime Minister: No, for the very reason that I have just given, which is that my hon. Friend has not avoided United Kingdom tax, has followed the ministerial code completely and has acted in accordance with the advice that he was given.

Mr. George Turner: The whole House will recall that, as a matter of policy, the Conservative party in government underplayed consistently the dangers of BSE. Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge the consistency of the Leader of the Opposition in continuing that policy? Does he agree that Government lotteries should be confined to the newsagent and not extended to the butcher's shop?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are dealing with the £4 billion legacy of the chaos and incompetence that the previous Government engendered. The last people from whom we will take lessons on how to deal with the crisis are members of the party that created it.

Q14. [19643] **Mr. Loughton:** I really do want to help the Prime Minister. Let us pretend for a moment that the Paymaster General is a model taxpayer. Let us cast aside all the questions about trustees and the Channel Islands. Does he agree that it would be better if the Paymaster General, any Labour Member or any member of the British public simply held their assets and their money in this country—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loughton: Would it not be better if the Paymaster General—if he has nothing to hide—held all his assets in this country, fully subject to the rigours of the Inland Revenue?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to help, and I think that he did. This little exhibition at Question Time demonstrates the cheek of that lot there. We remember their record throughout the past few years. As we are talking about foreign money, perhaps we could find out how much foreign money they got in funds for their political party. For them to shield themselves in the robes of financial probity is a joke. It is seen and regarded as a joke. They have no credibility whatever.

BILL PRESENTED

SCOTLAND

Mr. Secretary Dewar, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Cook, Mr. Secretary Straw, Secretary Margaret Beckett, Dr. John Cunningham, Mr. Secretary Robertson, Secretary Harriet Harman, Mr. Secretary Davies and Mr. Henry McLeish presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and Administration and other changes in the government of Scotland; to provide for changes in the constitution and functions of certain public bodies; to provide for the variation of the basic rate of income tax in relation to income of Scottish taxpayers in accordance with a resolution of the Scottish Parliament; to amend the law about parliamentary constituencies in Scotland; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 104].

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It relates to Prime Minister's questions. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) asked a lengthy question about personal equity plans and individual savings accounts. However, the Register of Members' Interests declares that he is deputy chairman of Guinness Flight Hambro Asset Management Ltd. It lists associate companies such as Guinness Flight Global Strategy Fund Ltd., among others. He has clearly been involved in advocacy on behalf of those bodies, because PEPs and ISAs are in direct opposition to their interests.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Member and the House are aware, no Member has to declare an interest during Question Time. If he has some point to make—it seems that he has—he should approach the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards about the matters.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that, over the past two days, many hundreds, if not many thousands, of farmers from all over the United Kingdom have been making representations in the House of Commons about the severe distress they face. In the light of the fact that the European Council of Agriculture Ministers has met in the past two days, have you had any request from the Minister of Agriculture, or anybody else in the Ministry of Agriculture, for a statement to explain what they are going to do to help farmers to get out of their severe problems?

Madam Speaker: I believe that the House can expect a statement from the Minister of Agriculture before we rise for the Christmas recess.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Hon. Members may not be obliged to declare interests at Question Time, but I believe that they are obliged to do so before they speak in a debate. Last night, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), to whom I have given notice of my point of order, made a winding-up speech on the National Minimum Wage Bill, but failed to declare that he is a director in the remunerated employment of Tamaris plc and has shares in Quality Care Homes, both of which are companies that pay £3 or a little less an hour. Although asked to do so, he made no reference to that interest.

Under the resolution of the House of 6 November 1995, advocacy and failure to declare an interest in a person or body from which an hon. Member may benefit is against the rules of the House. I must ask you, Madam Speaker, to investigate this matter. Despite an invitation last night to declare an interest, there was a flagrant, arrogant refusal to accept. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks has a direct financial interest in rejecting the minimum wage Bill, and keeping wages as low as possible.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. I remind the House that all hon. Members who have a financial interest or any interest at all in the subject under debate are required when speaking in the House to declare

[Madam Speaker]

that interest—and at the very beginning of their speech, not at any part of the way through. You may care, Mr. Macshane, to report the matter to the Parliamentary Commissioner.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I do not want to prolong points of order, which seem to be spurred on once we get to this point on a Wednesday. I call Mr. Winnick.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): You said, Madam Speaker, as we know, that it is not necessary to declare an interest during Question Time. Does not that undermine declaration of interest during debate? After all, Question Time is a very important feature of the House. If an hon. Member has a declared interest, surely he or she may get out of declaring it by raising the matter during Question Time.

The hon. Member named by my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) has a duty to explain the matter in the House. Otherwise, it could be said that he has concealed a very important interest. If he is an honourable Member, as I am sure he is, he will want to justify, or try to justify, what he has done.

Madam Speaker: The House has never required any Member to declare an interest during Question Time. I can well imagine—as I am sure the House can—that, if Members had to declare interests at Prime Minister's Question Time and other Question Times, we would not get past Questions 3 or 4. I know that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) is making a very serious point—*[Interruption.]* Please let me finish. The hon. Member may wish to pursue the point. If he does, perhaps he will put it to the Procedure Committee, which would consider it.

Mr. Barnes: On another point of order, Madam Speaker. The point that I am attempting to make may have been missed. The problem is not about an hon. Member needing to declare an interest when asking a question. It is a question of advocacy. Interests are recorded in the Register of Members' Interests. The matter is for you, because you may stop an hon. Member proceeding if advocacy is being engaged in.

Madam Speaker: I do not enforce the regulation. It is for the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to carry out such duties and for any hon. Member—in this case Mr. Barnes—to inform the Commissioner of the information he has. It is not for the Chair.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a totally different point of order, Madam Speaker. Incidentally, if I had to declare an interest every time, I would never get to the question.

When I first entered the House, before you were Speaker, your predecessor used to refer to tedious and repetitive speeches, as you have yourself. It has always been a rule of the House that hon. Members should not indulge in such speeches. Should not the question writers for the Opposition take time over Christmas to practise some variations on a theme, like Paganini, and return with a new theme of questions for next year?

Madam Speaker: That might be a helpful suggestion for some of the tedious and repetitive questions that I see on the Order Paper from hon. Members on the Government side as well. I read the Order Paper thoroughly every day.

Energy Efficiency (Information)

3.40 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to improve the gathering and provision of information on the energy efficiency of homes.

The Bill seeks to amend the 1994 building regulations to improve consumer information and save the environment. It is about thinking globally and acting locally. The objective is to give consumers good information so that they can buy or rent more energy-efficient homes, which would reduce fuel bills and emissions of gases, including carbon dioxide. As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who led the British delegation last week in Kyoto, said:

"Unless we act now"—

on the greenhouse gases that cause global warming—

"we shall be condemning our children to a world of drought and crop failures, rising seas, mass migration and spreading disease."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1997; Vol. 303, c. 129.]

The Bill would make a contribution to that important work.

The practice of energy-rating houses, especially new houses, began some years ago. The intention was to show how energy-efficient a house was, so that a potential purchaser or tenant could judge one property against another on its energy use, and therefore fuel bills. Houses were given a rating for energy efficiency, but there were several unofficial rating systems, which were run by various energy consultants.

In 1992, the Environment Select Committee, in its fourth report, recommended that the Government sought to establish one national home energy rating scheme and actively promote it in the market. The Government have devised the standard assessment procedure, or SAP rating, which rated houses from 1, or highly energy-inefficient, to 100, or highly energy-efficient. To advance the cause of energy efficiency, the idea was incorporated into the 1994 building regulations, under which builders were required to produce an SAP rating for all new houses and for conversions which constituted a material change of use under planning law. The intention was to ensure one standard rating and to make it available so that purchasers had information on the energy efficiency of a house before buying or renting.

However, the scheme has not worked properly. If we can get it to work properly, energy rating could make an important contribution to getting everyone to think about energy conservation and efficiency. It is a win-win policy. The impact of energy conservation on fuel poverty and the environment could be substantial.

The Energy Saving Trust has calculated that energy conservation measures could save nearly 20 per cent. of domestic energy consumption in the UK by 2010. For some households, that would mean savings of up to £250 every year on their fuel bills, and it would save the UK as a whole some £6 billion. Such measures would also cut the domestic sector's carbon dioxide emissions by 14 per cent. However, to achieve those figures, every opportunity to improve energy efficiency must be taken.

The Bill would strengthen the building regulations to encourage energy efficiency, and would address the two shortcomings in the 1994 regulations. First, the requirement for quality control was not strict enough; secondly, there was no requirement to inform prospective purchasers or tenants of a house's SAP rating.

The effect of the first shortcoming has been expertly summed up by Professor Jake Chapman:

"The current situation is that many insulation manufacturers, boiler makers, heating designers and architects offer free SAP ratings to builders based on free and unchecked software. There is no quality control over the software or the data entered into the programmes. Most people using the system have not read the Government's published guidance notes that explain the conventions for assessing properties. As a result, building control officers do not have any confidence in the SAP rating being debated and have no reason to pursue the matter further."

The effect of the second shortcoming is that purchasers and tenants are often not told of the SAP rating. Professor Chapman added:

"Many builders would be ashamed if the low SAP ratings of their properties were publicised to customers. Currently the average SAP rating for new private houses is about 70. This compares with an average of 85 to 90 for housing association properties. This difference is created at very little additional cost."

The additional costs at the time of building have been estimated at a mere £250 per dwelling, yet the impact on fuel bills can be substantial. Opportunities are being missed.

The additional costs of extra insulation and better boilers or controls are very low when a home is first built. Installing smaller insulation is cost-effective only if it is built in from the start. This is much more important for new houses, as new housing sets the standards of expectation for the rest of the market. If builders promoted their new homes as energy-efficient, it would have a ripple effect throughout the housing market.

My Bill deals with the shortcomings in the 1994 regulations. It will require tougher control of the issuing of SAP ratings, and will require those ratings to be stated in all promotional material relating to the sale or letting of a property. That will enable people to see how energy-efficient their prospective home is, and will be a further force towards greater energy efficiency.

The Bill will cost central and local government nothing, and will contribute to reducing fuel bills. It will help people to live in warmer homes, which, on a cold day like today, will be appreciated by everybody. It will help reduce greenhouse and other gases. This short Bill will follow the excellent work done on the world agenda by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in Kyoto. It is good for purses and good for the planet, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Julia Drown, Mr. Clive Efford, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Ms Tess Kingham, Mr. David Chaytor, Angela Smith, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mrs. Linda Gilroy, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Tony Colman and Ms Debra Shipley.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY (INFORMATION)

Ms Julia Drown accordingly presented a Bill to improve the gathering and provision of information on the energy efficiency of homes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 30 January, and to be printed [Bill 105].

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Act 1997.

Special Immigration Appeals Commission Act 1997.

Supreme Court (Offices) Act 1997.

Scottish Agricultural College Order Confirmation Act 1997.

Fisheries

[Relevant documents: European Community Document No. 8371/96 laying down certain technical measures for the conservation of fishery resources; European Community Document No. 7055/97 relating to the total allowable catches for 1997; European Community Document No. 9893/97 relating to the multi-annual guidance programmes for fishing fleets at the end of 1996.]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th December 1997 relating to the fixing of total allowable catches for 1998 and certain conditions under which they may be fished; and supports the Government's intentions to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen based on sustainable fisheries management, effective enforcement and the need to ensure that the regional differences of fisheries and their communities are fully recognised.

The House usually has a debate on fisheries late in December, in advance of the setting of the total allowable catch and quotas for the coming year. Although I have participated in such debates for eight years, this is my fist time speaking from the Government Front Bench. Through that participation over the years, I know how important this debate is to hon. Members from fishing communities, and I am pleased that we are maintaining the tradition this year, with the opportunity not only to debate the forthcoming decisions of the Fisheries Council later this week but to review other important aspects of fisheries policy.

It is right, I believe, to open the debate by recalling the exceptional nature of the fishing industry and the demands that it places on those who go to sea. Catching fish to meet the needs of consumers is a hazardous and unpredictable business; and it is a business that, sadly, results all too often in loss of life. Most recently, we have to recall the sad loss of the Margaretha Maria and the Sapphire, and the tragic loss of their crews.

All those who follow these debates regularly will know the difficulties relating to fisheries policy in this country. Our inheritance as a new Government has not been an easy one. Little progress had been made on meeting multi-annual guidance programme IV targets, and we were faced with the debacle of quota hoppers and the totally unrealistic expectations raised by policies designed not to deal with real problems of over-capacity and sustainability but to pander to the prejudices of Euro-sceptics in the Conservative party, no matter what damage that approach did to the long-term interests of the fishing industry. I appreciate the fact that there are honourable exceptions among Conservative Members to that remark.

The Government have been determined to adopt realistic and workable policies in the fisheries sector, and not to duck tough decisions. We made it clear from the start that we would apply the rules of the common fisheries policy properly, and that we would look to the Commission and other member states to do likewise. Our approach to the CFP has not been uncritical, but it has been realistic.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): As my hon. Friend knows, I am an honorary president of

the Clyde Fishermen's Association—I do not get anything for that—and serious concerns have been expressed to us both about the immense pressures on the west coast scallop fishery. It is not a pressure stock. I hope that he will say something to allay the serious but entirely legitimate concerns of the Clyde fishermen.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right: I am well aware of his long involvement in the fishing industry. He has spoken in all the debates that I have attended. I am aware of the matter he raises about the scallop industry. The issue is not covered in the total allowable catches and quotas in the Council, and part of it comes under our inshore regulations, but we are considering it. If my hon. Friend wants to raise the matter with me formally on behalf of his constituents, I will be only too pleased to consider it, and to give him a direct response.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Minister may remember the condemnation by the Select Committee on European Legislation, on which I serve, of the last round of the Fisheries Council. The Committee said:

"There is no doubt that the United Kingdom has done badly out of the decision taken at the Fisheries Council."

Since then, we have had to issue another report, on 10 December, in which there is again severe criticism of the Government for not providing information about what is really going on with the massive cuts that are proposed, which I will not set out. The report said:

"We believe it would have been helpful to the House if information of the kind set out in *Worldfish Report* had been included".

Can we assume that we will have a proper, candid, open and transparent description of the real position in today's debate? Does the Minister accept that such condemnation from a Select Committee on which the Government have a majority speaks for itself?

Mr. Morley: I accept that there have been problems in getting information and documents to Committees. We have made representations about that delay to the Commission. We will be happy to consider suggestions on how information is presented, and if the Select Committee wants to make recommendations to the Government, we will respond appropriately.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Would it be useful if, when Members of the European Parliament got their papers from the Commission, members of the European Legislation Select Committee, on which I serve, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), could get them at the same time, with the Commission's comments? At present, we get only the Government's comments, and do not know what the Commission says.

Mr. Morley: That would seem a reasonable suggestion, and it may be worth looking at. There have been delays in obtaining information for scrutiny, and that is not acceptable. I want to make that clear to hon. Members.

The previous Administration left the issue of quota hoppers suspended and in a totally unworkable state. Quota hoppers—the foreign ownership of UK-flagged fishing vessels and the consequent rights for foreign interests to use UK quotas—is a problem which has exercised the industry. The previous Administration claimed that that problem could be resolved by adding a protocol to the treaty. That was a bogus claim. They ignored the fact that not a single member state of the European Union supported the proposal they had made for such a treaty change. Not even the member states that were suffering similar problems and were sympathetic supported a treaty change at the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I shall be happy to give way when I have finished this point.

Having examined the situation and discovered the negotiating realities that we had inherited, we secured instead an understanding with the European Commission in the form of an exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and the President of the Commission. This gave an authoritative view as to the measures we could apply to secure a firm economic link between the vessels using UK quotas and the interests and communities dependent on fisheries.

Mr. Jack: Will the Minister acknowledge that the Barber judgment, which was a protocol on the Maastricht treaty, was an example in which not all member states agreed with our view, but in which we did get our way—to the benefit of the United Kingdom and pension holders?

Mr. Morley: The fact remains that getting a protocol or an amendment of that kind requires a unanimous decision in this case. The prospect of getting a unanimous decision from countries such as Spain and the Netherlands on issues directly against their interests is not realistic. To get a change in a protocol, there has to be some support. There was no support whatsoever for that change from any other country. It was not a realistic option.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): Is it not a fact that that would have been an option if we had been prepared to go to the wire and say, "Unless you agree to this, we will veto the whole treaty"? Amsterdam would have fallen. That would not have been allowed to happen under any circumstances. That is the card that the Government had to play, but they lost their will and did not play it.

Mr. Morley: I am not convinced that that was an option. We have been through all this before over beef. The previous Government had a policy of non-co-operation. They said that if they ran that policy, the beef ban would be lifted. It was a failure. It did enormous damage to our relationship with Europe and it damaged our industries, not least the fishing industry, and went a great deal wider than that. Adopting such a policy in this case would have been equally damaging. Those who are opposed to the concept of the European Union would support such a move, but it was not a realistic option.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) *rose—*

Mr. Morley: If hon. Members will forgive me, I must make some progress.

[Mr. Morley]

Detailed proposals have been put to the fishing industry as to how the economic link in relation to licences can be operated. We have had valuable feedback, which is helpful in developing our ideas. We expect to reach a final view on the measures to be implemented very shortly, taking account of the advice of the European Commission.

It is only fair to say that the views coming from different parts of the industry are diverse, and that the enthusiasm for stringent measures has not been uniformly expressed even by some well-established representatives of the UK fishing industry. Those who think that the proposed conditions on licences would count for little may be surprised at some of the reactions to this proposal. That is something we shall need to take into account in deciding on the measures to be applied.

I turn to the Commission's proposals for the total allowable catches and quotas to apply in 1998. I regret that, as in previous years, they have appeared very late in the day, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). That makes it difficult for us, and for all member states, to prepare for important decisions in the December Council. I have taken the matter up with the Fisheries Commissioner. To allow the fullest possible parliamentary scrutiny and consultation, we made available papers containing as much detail as possible before the Commission's proposals were published. I accept that there is room for improvement, and we will press for that.

The proposals cover some 120 different TACs. There is an increase on previous years, because six new TACs in the North sea—sand eels, monkfish, megrim, turbot, mixed flatfish and skates and rays—are proposed. The adoption of the new TACs is welcome. They will help to conserve stocks and prevent increased fishing efforts from being introduced by countries that have not traditionally fished for them.

I also welcome the fact that, for the first time, a TAC is to be set for sand eels. Hon. Members know of the Government's concern about the impact of industrial fishing. Although we think that the proposed TAC on sand eels is far too high, it presents us with the opportunity to argue for catch limitations on industrial fisheries.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am sure that the House is with the Minister in welcoming the new TACs, but do not the Government expect producer organisations to try to administer them from 1 January? For the first time, some of those are mixed TACs. Some are listed under the Norwegian "other" category. Given that they are dealing with track records that are five or six years out of date, how are producer organisations expected to cope with the administration of the new TACs? Will the Government consider undertaking their administration at least for the first year, to allow the producer organisations to sort things out in an orderly way?

Mr. Morley: I accept the criticism that the new TACs were announced at short notice and that the producer organisations have not had time to consider them. I would have to reflect carefully on the Government administering the TACs. They are much better administered by producer organisations. While I appreciate their problems, I hope that they will be able to resolve them. If there are difficulties, I am sure that they will make representations to the Ministry in the normal way.

Mr. Jack: Before we leave the difficult subject of administration and availability of information, can the Minister assure us that he will lodge a minute with the Council tomorrow, laying down the requirements in clear terms, so that the problem he described at the start of his speech does not happen again next year?

Mr. Morley: I would be more than pleased if, by lodging a minute, I could ensure that such things did not happen again next year. I am willing to take all appropriate measures to draw this unsatisfactory situation to the attention of the Commission. I will consider the matter.

For the remaining stocks, the Commission proposes increases or the status quo for some, and cuts for others. The year-on-year changes are based on the advice of the fisheries scientists of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. It is particularly important that the scientists are developing a precautionary approach in their advice. Few would argue against a prudent and cautious approach to fish stock management.

We must take seriously the scientists' assessment of the state of stocks. At the same time, it is important that the scientists should draw on the day-to-day practical experience of the fishing industry in making their assessments. An effective dialogue between fisheries scientists and fishermen is vital if the scientific advice is to be valued and accepted by the industry.

A good example of the relationship working well is the responsible approach that the industry has taken to the TAC for North sea cod. That is an important stock, which must be protected. The scientists advise that it would be possible to raise the TAC to 150,000 tonnes in 1998 and still increase the spawning stock biomass to within safe biological limits. However, to speed the rebuilding of the stock, the Government have pressed, with the support of the industry, for the TAC to be limited to 140,000 tonnes.

I am glad to report that that figure has now been agreed in the annual consultations between the Community and Norway over the management of this and other North sea stocks. It is an excellent example of joint industry-Government co-operation in ensuring sustainability.

Naturally, however, fishermen are concerned about some of the cuts proposed by the Commission. I met leaders of the UK industry this morning. We had a full discussion, so that I was able to hear their concerns and priorities. I was able to assure them that, at the Fisheries Council tomorrow, we will seek increases in TACs to reflect their concerns where that is compatible with the conservation of the stocks. But I emphasised that our approach has to be responsible if stocks are to recover from some of the current low levels.

I am pleased that, in addition to developing the dialogue with fisheries scientists on the state of the stocks, the British fishing industry has co-operated closely with fisheries departments and scientists in the lengthy and complicated negotiations on new technical conservation measures. Those measures are designed to conserve stocks by reducing catches of juvenile fish and discards.

In October, after many months of negotiations, we secured a good package that met the key needs of our industry on mesh sizes, and, for the first time, introduced

into Community legislation the square mesh panels that our industry strongly supports as a means of increasing the selectivity of nets. Among a range of other provisions, we secured important new measures in the shellfish sector, which have been particularly warmly welcomed.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): The Minister has referred to the cod TAC: perhaps he could tell us the logic behind the decision to increase that catch but not that for haddock by anything like the same proportion.

Mr. Morley: The recommendation for increasing the TAC of a species comes from ICES and the fisheries scientists. They reach that decision on the basis of their monitoring and measurement of stocks. It is their view that the cod catch could be increased to a greater extent than that of haddock. We must take that scientific advice into account when making a decision on TACs.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Something of a paradox exists because, although the cod stock is increasing and recovering, it is still outside safe biological limits, whereas the haddock stock is inside that safe limit. It is important to stress that unless working fishermen can understand the reasoning behind some of the scientific advice, it loses credibility, and it becomes all the more difficult to enforce TACs.

Will the Minister assure the House that he will look carefully at the advice given on haddock to see whether something can be done, perhaps through the industrial by-catch element, to allow for an increase in the haddock catch, which the evidence seems to support even if the scientific recommendation does not?

Mr. Morley: The points raised by the hon. Members for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) were also raised with me this morning in a meeting with representatives of the industry. I undertook to query the total allowable catch with the Commission in the Fisheries Council. We need good science, but there must be co-operation between the industry and scientists. It is right and appropriate that when scientists make a recommendation which, on the face of it, appears contradictory, they need to explain their case for it. We will certainly examine that reasoning and ensure that the information is made available.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Does not this matter serve as a timely reminder to the Government to bear in mind the fact that, although advisers can give the advice, they must make the tactical decision on whether that advice is correct and appropriate? The Minister has been reminded again this afternoon that it is not practical, as proposed, to catch fish before they have had a chance to breed. Surely to goodness it should therefore be possible for the politicians to move in to stop that, instead of simply sheltering behind the advice given them by scientists.

Mr. Morley: On occasions, a political decision must be taken in relation to TACs and quotas, but one must have a basis for doing so. One cannot take such political decisions just because one would like to have more fish. If such an attitude is taken, the stocks will be run down and there will be no fish. There must be a baseline and some kind of reference point, and that must come from scientists.

It is true that fisheries science, by its very nature, is imprecise; nevertheless we must take into account the advice offered, and use it as a starting point from which to work. That is important.

Mr. Gill *rose—*

Mr. Morley: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must make some progress.

MAGP IV—multi-annual guidance programme IV—is a major issue which has preoccupied both the Government and the fishing industry for two years. It has been a sword of Damocles over the industry because of the uncertainty about the size of the cuts that the industry faced in view of the need for effort control.

I must repeat that the situation the Government inherited was far from satisfactory. The previous Administration adopted a negotiating technique that greatly reduced their potential influence on the final outcome, in that it became clear that they would not vote in favour of any likely conclusion. Since May, we have been seeking to recover the ground in the negotiations to prepare a detailed United Kingdom plan to implement the April decisions on MAGP IV. I can now say that we have succeeded in making considerable progress, and in mitigating the scale of the cuts that the industry feared.

First, we had to put right various technical flaws concerning MAGP III. I am pleased to report that we succeeded in getting agreement on the long overdue technical changes in the proposals for the Commission's final MAGP IV decisions. As a result, our overall shortfall on tonnage for MAGP III will reduce to less then 3 per cent., and we shall have met our total power target under that scheme.

The 1997 decommissioning scheme, the results of which I announced on 3 December, will help to narrow the gap further, but there remain significant shortfalls in both the pelagic and beam trawl segments. The profitability of those segments has effectively precluded any real interest in decommissioning until now.

For MAGP IV, we, like all other member states, are still awaiting the formal adoption by the Commission of our definitive targets. Regrettably, that has been delayed. It should have taken place before 30 November. On the assumption that the proposals considered by the management committee at the end of October are confirmed, we shall have secured a treatment of the main demersal and nephrops fisheries that should make it possible to avoid the need to restrict time at sea, provided that present effort levels do not increase, and that other measures directed at the conservation of fish stocks are fully respected.

We shall also have secured recognition of certain new fishing opportunities for the pelagic fleet, which should help to offset continued growth in that segment. In addition, there will be separate targets for the beam trawl fleet as between the North sea fishery and those in the south-west, which will enable the implementing measures to be applied appropriately to the different parts of that fleet. That will be an important and helpful outcome for our fishing industry, because it means that we can avoid the need for fishing effort controls on the great majority of fishing vessels.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not increasingly clear that the whole machinery of European

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Commission control of catches and the husbandry effort that it has made, which often bears no comparison with the successful efforts unilaterally conducted by Iceland and Norway, means that—certainly following the enlargement of the EU now in prospect, including the accession of Estonia and Poland with their significant fishing fleets—if we are to maintain the crazy notion of a "common resource", much of which is our territorial water, stocks will continue to decline, there will be further decommissioning, and more British fishermen will be put out of work?

Mr. Morley: I have said several times that, in my view, the term "common resource" is out of date, as fish stocks are now protected by the idea of relative stability, which means that our share of the fish quota is protected within the common fisheries policy.

It is true that countries outside Europe have had successful fisheries regimes, but that has not always been the case—certainly not for Norway, whose industrial fishery collapsed, or for Canada, where the cod fishery has collapsed. There is no guarantee that going it alone necessarily brings an improvement in fisheries policy. What is clear is that, even if we could go it alone, we would still have to have a pan-European fisheries management policy.

Mr. Godman: May I make a plea on behalf of the nephrops fishermen? Can they be allowed to remain in their separate segment, as in MAGP III? That is an important issue for nephrops fishermen.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right: that is an important issue for that sector. However, many of the vessels move in and out of the white fish sector, and there is logic in having nephrops and the demersal fleet in the same sector. We shall, of course, consider any representations that we receive.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister is making an interesting statement. Could he elaborate on what he has said about the pelagic sector, because the expectation under MAGP IV was for a sizeable cut in that sector at a time when the TACs were debating a 60 per cent. increase in North sea herring and a 20 per cent. increase in North sea mackerel? It would be ironic if, despite having far more fishing opportunities, the time that pelagic vessels were allowed to be at sea was cut. Does the Minister think that MAGP IV is a good mechanism for restructuring the pelagic fleet, and does the review clause at the end of 1999 enable us to defer decisions on the pelagic fleet?

Mr. Morley: I confirm that the review clause in 1999 will allow us to examine the progress of the whole MAGP. The majority of the fleet has now met its MAGP target in total. Effort restrictions will apply to only about 250 vessels, including the pelagic fleet. There has been substantial expansion of and investment in the pelagic fleet in recent years. Although increases have been recommended for mackerel and for North sea herring, some of the pelagic stocks to the west of Scotland are in a pretty poor state.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) made a good point. The central question is whether capacity reduction is appropriate for pelagic stocks, the availability of which is subject to wild swings. Once capacity has been reduced, there is no access to bring it back. The Minister would be well advised to consider how the Dutch manage effort limitation on the pelagic side. They do it in such a way as to meet MAGP requirements without seriously inconveniencing the fleet. Would that not be a better method than the blunt instrument of capacity reduction? Perhaps a more sophisticated method is necessary, so as not to fling away the fishing opportunities to which the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland referred.

Mr. Morley: It may be useful if I finish what I was saying about MAGP IV, because I shall touch on some of the points that the hon. Gentlemen have raised. We are keen to implement effort limitations in co-operation with the industries concerned, and to give them the option of managing those effort limitations themselves. If they have workable schemes, such as the Dutch scheme, that is fine by us.

I appreciate that effort limitation is a burden on the pelagic sector, as it has not been decommissioning. However, one of the advantages of effort limitation is that, if stocks improve and if the science shows that there is increased availability and opportunities for fishing, the fleet could be allowed to expand. That is a more flexible way of dealing with the problem than decommissioning.

Effort is most in excess of our targets in the pelagic and beam trawl segments. We understand why they have not responded to the decommissioning schemes, but the only practical alternative for the Government is to introduce effort controls for those segments. That will come as no surprise to those sectors.

Given the relatively small number of vessels involved—about 250—the Government's preference is for groups of vessels to co-operate in managing their effort collectively, along the lines of the current management of quotas by producer organisations. That covers the points that the hon. Gentlemen raised. Effort allocations would be set annually by group and by fishery, and would be aimed at reducing effort to the final MAGP IV targets over the next four years. The average effort reduction is likely to be 30 per cent. for the pelagic sector and 15 per cent. for beam trawlers, with higher figures of about 36 and 19 per cent. respectively for the North sea.

Detailed discussions with the fishermen concerned will begin as soon as practicable, but the monitoring of effort and its recording against the new targets will have to begin from 1 January 1998. If agreement on the sort of devolved flexible arrangements that the Government are suggesting cannot be reached, a centralised system will have to be imposed to ensure that the relevant annual limits are not breached. That will include, if necessary, the closure of fisheries when effort allocations are exhausted. Inevitably, a centrally imposed system will be less flexible and sensitive to market needs, so I hope that the industry will respond constructively to the Government's proposal for self-management.

Mr. Jack: I seek clarification. The Minister seems to want to sub-contract his effort control to the industry. Can he confirm that that would be a burden on the industry? Does he have proposals for financial assistance for the

industry for managing effort control? Has he ruled out further moneys for decommissioning in the sectors that he has mentioned?

Mr. Morley: I shall shortly deal with those matters. For the reasons that I have given, it is surely more desirable to put the management of effort control in the hands of the industry so that it can take choices that fit working patterns while enabling it to reach the targets. I think that the industry will welcome that. The right hon. Gentleman asks about financial support. We are operating on the budget that was left to us by the previous Government, and they made no such provision. We have to work within those financial limits.

For the newly combined demersal/nephrops segment, which is roughly half the UK fleet or some 1,500 vessels over 10 m, we do not plan any restriction on time at sea in 1998. In deciding on that approach, we have taken account of the effort targets that are being defined, the impact of the current decommissioning and the effect of strengthened enforcement. Fishing effort remains a matter of concern in fisheries where scientific advice is for reductions in fish mortality. For that reason, fishing effort will be very carefully monitored, and we shall strengthen enforcement to help to ensure that quotas and other conservation measures are properly respected.

The position will be kept under review in 1998 and beyond, so that action can be taken if fishing effort does not respond as envisaged. If effort limits prove necessary, the reference period for any management measures would be based on effort prior to 1998. We are making that clear now, so that fishermen know that there is nothing to be gained by attempting to build up a record of increased fishing activity. The approach to the remaining segments of the fleet—lines and nets, shellfish, fixed and mobile—will be on the same lines, although for distant water vessels the application of article 8 of the April Council decision needs to be further clarified with the Commission in the light of the continuing consultations with industry on the proposals that we sent to it in September. That will be taken forward as soon as practicable.

There is one other general change in relation to MAGP IV compared with MAGP III, which I should like to signal now—the handling of segmentation. Under the previous arrangements, a vessel's allocation to a specific fleet segment was purely for statistical purposes. Under MAGP IV, there are differential effort targets for different parts of the fleet. As a result, we must have arrangements that determine in advance the segment and targets to which a particular vessel is subject for the coming year. Full details are set out in reply to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), which I am answering today. In brief, the arrangements will mean that, initially, a vessel will be subject to the effort regime of the segment in which it fished in 1996. As no effort constraints are planned for the great bulk of the fleet, the impact of this new requirement is likely to be very narrow.

We are taking this opportunity to make some changes to our licensing arrangements. Again, these will primarily affect the pelagic sector and will extend the ring fence around the pelagic fleet to prevent further growth in its capacity.

We shall also be setting down a timetable for linking the licensing of all fishing vessels to the declaration of maximum continuous engine power, as well as reviewing the operation of the licensing system to see whether and how that might be improved. We should like to involve the fishing industry in the review, and I am proposing that officials should hold a series of meetings with representatives of the principal fishermen's organisations during 1998. There are acknowledged difficulties in the reliable recording of engine power and it is important that we address those if MAGP IV is to operate fairly and reliably. For that reason, I hope that the licensing review—again, with representatives of the industry—will look at the arrangements that will need to be made for the licensing of maximum continuous engine power.

My final remarks on MAGP IV relate to future decommissioning, to which the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred. The initial implementing arrangements which I have described are expected to be sufficient for immediate purposes to ensure satisfactory progress towards our targets. As the bulk of the UK fleet has now met its targets, there is no requirement for decommissioning for the vast majority of the UK fleet. The previous Administration made no financial provision for decommissioning beyond this year; nor did they provide for grants towards satellite monitoring.

Before reaching any view on whether we should operate decommissioning or other new measures in future, we need to complete the comprehensive spending review that is currently taking place. In respect of fisheries, the review is looking at all aspects of expenditure, whether on administration and enforcement, or on the various grants that are currently paid. It will examine the future need for such expenditure and the ways in which it could be funded in the future, including the possibility of the industry itself making a contribution. Thus, the range and scale of all expenditure will be looked at, and the scale and financing of—and, of course, the need for—any decommissioning will be decided when that review is concluded.

Mr. Gill: Before concluding his remarks, will the Minister make it quite clear to the House what he understands relative stability to mean in relation to the British fishing fleet? Is he saying that, regardless of how many new members join the European Union and assuming that fish stocks remain static, the amount of fish that the British fishing fleet will be permitted to catch will remain constant in terms of tonnage?

Mr. Morley: No. It is the share that will remain constant and not necessarily the tonnage, because stocks and quotas vary from year to year. I can confirm that the principle of relative stability means that any new members that join an enlarged European Union will not have the right to fish on quota in our waters, or in Community waters, unless they have a track record of having done so.

The House will appreciate that this is a difficult package, especially for some parts of the fishing industry; but it represents a very considerable improvement on what they might have expected some months ago. In particular, we are able to limit the introduction of effort controls to no more than about 250 vessels, and there is no current expectation of effort controls being required for the rest of the fleet in order to meet the targets of MAGP IV. We are offering the industry the opportunity to share in the task of managing effort and managing quota more effectively and thus take a greater responsibility for the successful management of fisheries. I hope that the

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industry will work with us to make the controls that are needed as flexible as possible, as it is in its own best interests to do.

I referred earlier to the need for conservation measures to be fully respected. Since taking office on 1 May, I and my colleagues have repeatedly emphasised that the long-term future of the industry depends on the effective conservation of fish stocks. That includes action to deal with the problems created by black fish. Our commitment to improve standards of enforcement was spelt out at the high-level talks my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture had with the leaders of the fishing industry in July. As promised then, we shall be consulting industry in the new year about plans to introduce a system of designated ports for white fish landings made by our larger vessels. That, coupled with the phased introduction of satellite monitoring, will enable us to make much better use of the resources we devote to enforcement.

At the same time, we have been actively reviewing with the European Commission the steps that might be taken to raise enforcement standards across the Community, following up the undertaking the Commission President gave to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Amsterdam in June. We can expect to see the Commission's ideas in the new year, and we have made it clear that we will give priority to examining them during our presidency.

There will continue to be a great deal to do during 1998 to secure the future of the fishing industry. I have already referred to the implementation of MAGP IV, the need to look at the financing of the fisheries sector in the context of the comprehensive spending review, and our determination to develop improved enforcement measures in the UK and across the Community.

In January 1998, Britain takes up the presidency of the European Union. For fisheries, that means that my right hon. Friend will chair the two meetings of the Council which are planned, and we see good prospects of using this opportunity not just to manage the business efficiently, but to focus on some important issues—including not only enforcement, as I have mentioned, but the environmental dimensions of the CFP and policy development, including the more effective involvement of local fishermen in the management processes.

We have agreed with the European Commission that it will be promoting with us a debate on how to improve EU-wide enforcement of the common fisheries policy, and I am optimistic that we shall be able to adopt new and more effective rules. Environmental issues will be addressed through measures to phase out drift nets used for tuna fishing, and so reduce the dolphin and other by-catches. We also envisage a review of action being taken to implement the Bergen inter-ministerial meeting on sustainable fishing in the North sea.

We need to be sure that everything possible is being done to apply well-based environmental measures where they can help the fisheries sector. We plan a debate on the marketing regime to give guidance to the Commission in preparing proposals; and the Council will also be looking at plans for handling the 2002 review of the CFP and having a report on the closer involvement of fishermen in fisheries management through regional meetings.

The Government intend to continue to keep in close touch with fishermen on all these matters as the presidency progresses.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: Briefly, as I must bring my remarks to a close.

Mr. Wallace: What does the Minister hope to achieve during the presidency to ensure much more equality of enforcement of fisheries measures throughout the Community?

Mr. Morley: That will be one of the priorities during our presidency. I attended the conference of Fisheries Ministers in Vigo, when enforcement was the main topic. I was very encouraged by the undoubted determination of all countries in the European Union to tackle enforcement and such issues as the landing and, indeed, the marketing of undersized fish, of which there is a long tradition in some countries. It is an issue on which we need to make progress, and we believe that there is support for that in both the Commission and the Council.

I have had many contacts with fishermen and fishermen's organisations during my time as a Minister. The leading organisations such as the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and, in Scotland, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation play a vital part in ensuring that the Government receive a full and balanced presentation of what the catching sector is thinking. I pay a warm tribute to the constructive role they have played. I would also like to take this opportunity to send good wishes to Cecil Finn, the president of the SFF, who is recovering from a triple heart bypass operation.

The NFFO and the SFF were key voices when, last July, we took the initiative of convening a meeting of a broad range of interests in the fishing industry. That high-level meeting went much wider than the catching sector and was, we believe, useful in giving broader direction to the consideration of policy. We envisage having a further high-level meeting early next year to look at the topics arising during our presidency.

The underlying problems of the fisheries sector are substantial, and a great deal remains to be done. It will not be easy for the fishing industry, which will need to accept continuing adjustments and rationalisation if it is to be sustainable and economic in the long term. However, the Government are determined to secure the industry's future and to plan the way forward in close contact with all parts of the industry, and taking full account of the interests of consumers and the environmental implications of fisheries policy.

For the first time in many years, we are making progress on a number of fronts relating to outstanding issues. The MAGP IV agreement gives the industry some stability, and it will come as a relief for most of the fleet. It is our priority to achieve a sustainable fishing industry and to give fishermen a real stake in managing it. While much remains to be done, the days of gesture politics to appease an anti-European rump are over.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): What a shame.

Mr. Morley: Our priority is a prosperous, stable and sustainable fishing industry [illegible]

diversity of our coastal communities and the crucial importance to certain regions of this national industry. The measures I have announced today are an important beginning in meeting those objectives.

I commend the motion to the House.

4.34 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I beg to move, To leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'notes the contents of the unnumbered explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th December 1997 outlining the basis of the negotiations for the December Fisheries Council; and supports efforts to secure the best possible sustainable fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom industry, but recognises that, whatever the Council's outcome, the Government have yet again failed Britain's fishermen through their inability to provide an EU Treaty-based solution to the question of quota hopping, any form of workable plan to enable the industry to respond to the demands of MAGP IV and a statement reflecting the Government's priorities in the forthcoming discussions on CFP reform.'.

I was intrigued by the sedentary intervention of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). His voice was a timely contribution to the debate because it showed that Labour Members are not going to allow the Minister to have his own way.

Before I get into the meat of the debate, on behalf of the Opposition, I repeat the Minister's salute to the industry. We associate ourselves with his remarks about the sad losses in the industry since the debate 12 months ago. Any hon. Member who read the newspaper reports of the raising of the vessel Sapphire, and the reports of the continuing anguish of the families, will understand only too clearly what a dangerous occupation fishing is. Those of us who enjoy our fish, whether in the form of traditional fish and chips or of more sophisticated dishes, have much for which to thank the fishing industry, which ensures a regular supply of excellent quality fish.

I join the Minister in sending my best wishes to Cecil Finn. He has been a doughty advocate of the industry north of the border, and we wish him well.

The Minister tried to give the impression that all was sweetness and light between the industry and the Labour party, but I took some comfort from a west country newspaper article that followed his first meeting as Minister. In the *Western Morning News* of 13 May, Jim Portus, chief executive of the South-West Fish Producers Organisation, said:

"I have never been so depressed after meeting with a Fisheries Minister. The whole atmosphere was clouded by his apparent determination that, having been given a legal obligation to reduce the fishing fleet, that is what we are going to do because we are all good Europeans now."

I felt slightly better having read that. Having been in the fishing industry's firing line, I am still dusting the flour from my coat, or at least my driver's coat, so I know what it is like. I sympathise with the Minister. It is a rough, tough industry to negotiate with, but it is worth standing up for.

I know that the Minister has a genuine interest in the fishing industry because I debated the matter with him when we were in government and he was in opposition, and he showed his expertise and understanding in the way in which he dealt with the interventions [illegible] him well [illegible] Fisheries and Food at the Agriculture Council. No doubt the Minister will read out the speaking notes, ably written by his officials, but the explanation will come from the Parliamentary Secretary.

As the hon. Member said, this is our annual opportunity to review the fishing industry and to hold the Government to account for their stewardship of fishing policy, for which they have been responsible for the past eight months. It is a great pity that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is not able to be here, because he will carry much of the burden. I am sure that he will be engaged in bilateral discussions with other fisheries Ministers.

Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), will be able to tell us in his winding-up speech whether the Minister will present the case on behalf of the United Kingdom industry in the form of a special presentation to the presidency and to the chairman of the Council of Ministers to make certain that our negotiating position is properly understood before the detailed discussions start tomorrow.

I want to review in a little more detail some of the issues involving total allowable catches and quotas that the Minister has mentioned. His party is fond of discussing openness. It is important that, in his winding-up speech, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland comments on how he views some of the genuine issues that the industry has put before him.

It is important that the Minister be held to account for what he achieves in the negotiations in Brussels. I hope that he will desist from the typical way in which a difficult negotiation is usually wrapped up: a press release, which was written before he left his new sumptuous premises in Smith square, is issued, which reads something like, "We had a terrifically tough negotiation." The Minister works out that any extra stock is worth X thousand or million pounds more, adds everything together and says that it is a tremendous result for the British fishing industry because the total value of the catch is going up; but that leaves people thrashing about if their sector has gone down or if it is the one for which the Minister has failed to meet his negotiating remit.

I want more a little more detail from the Minister about how he is to proceed. I am not accusing him of being a dishonest person, but will he assure us that he will be straightforward and honest when he reports the outcome of the Council?

I want to spend a little time examining the Minister's record on quota hopping, to probe him a little more on multi-annual guidance programme IV, to raise briefly the working time directive—a cause of deep concern in the industry, especially north of the border—to ask a question on behalf of the frozen food industry and its difficulties in persuading the Minister to talk to its representatives about supplies of fish from Russian sources, and to mention briefly the difficulties of the Thames fishing industry.

Mr. Morley: I must correct the impression that the right hon. Gentleman may have given. I recently met representatives of the frozen food industry to talk about the problems of Russian supply.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful [illegible]

[Mr. Jack]

industry representatives came to see me, they were having great difficulty in getting more than eight vessels registered as approved sources. I appreciate that fish hygiene has to be taken extremely seriously, but the Minister, who has a constituency interest in the frozen food sector, will understand the industry's worries in ensuring a plentiful supply of fish. He will know that the UK is in deficit in its fish supply, and how important those frozen cod blocks are. I am grateful that he has met industry representatives and I shall not press him further on the matter, but I hope that he will make every effort to resolve the niggling and awkward problem that first led the industry to come to see me.

The Minister implied that his party's relationships with Europe were in such good shape that he could look forward to a warm and cosy Council where he will achieve all his objectives. He may have forgotten what happened yesterday. We awoke to find that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had, in the nicest sense, been well and truly rolled over by the Standing Veterinary Committee, which voted 14 to one against the British proposals in connection with specified risk materials and the adaptation of those proposals for beef coming into this country. I do not want to let the debate veer off into a surf and turf discussion, but that is an illustration of the fact that not everything in the European garden is lovely.

I deal first with the use, for the first time in advice from the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management, of the precautionary approach. The Minister will be aware of the implications of that and the way it is being used in the context of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea's advice.

The industry recognises that some severe cuts in stocks have been proposed by the ACFM, but I think that the Minister will agree that it recognises that scientists have not always taken their own advice into account. In fact, it has been left to the Commission, recognising that there is a 40 per cent. floor on total allowable catch reductions, to temper the view of the scientists. However, a reduction of 40 per cent. in stock represents a massive swing in availability. The Minister will recognise that it destabilises vessel viability and rational marketing, and places terrific pressure on quota management.

I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say, especially as this approach can, in its own way, lead to a growth of discards, which is against the conservation objectives that the Minister wants to attain. I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that.

Will the Minister consider forming for the first time a joint council of fishermen and scientists to give him a permanent standing committee to offer advice on the question of stocks? The debate on proper TAC levels and quotas at this time of year is typified both by scientists' up-and-down view, which I have described, and by the view of fishermen, who say, "It's not really like that. We're not seeing that situation out there." The time has come when both sides of the debate need to reach some agreement.

The Minister was right to point out that it is best not to postpone detailed discussion to just before the Council meets. Although his own scientists gave the industry a

The time really has come when such a joint committee—perhaps sitting on a permanent basis, throughout the year—would be a much better way of trying to set the British position and of getting both sides to accept appropriate TAC levels and quotas. I shall be grateful if the Minister will consider it.

In sage interventions, hon. Members have pointed out that—to the industry's welcome—the North sea cod TAC has been increased substantially. I was delighted to hear mention of the conservation element of the increase, as a quantity of fish has been banked for the future. Nevertheless, although the cod stock has turned round remarkably in 18 months, one can imagine the industry's incredulity to learn that the very MAGP IV figures that the Minister presented to the House today were being formulated in a period in which that stock was said to be collapsing.

Substantial reductions in effort have been proposed using yesterday's stock information, whereas today's stock information shows substantial increases in the cod fishery. MAGP IV originally proposed that the cod sector of the fleet make a 30 per cent. cut in its fishing effort—demonstrating the real difficulty in people taking decisions with long-term implications for the industry on the basis of short-term and sometimes questionable scientific advice. I ask the Minister to comment on just how satisfied he is with the way in which scientific advice is being handled.

The reverse situation—of the North sea haddock TAC being reduced—must also be explored. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, haddock stock is inside its safe biological levels. As we question the science on quota sizes, so we should question the science dealing with cod and haddock as a mixed fishery. People do not understand how one part of a mixed fishery can increase when it is subject to the same fishing level as another part that has decreased. The Minister owes the House a better explanation for that, and should not simply rely on the good news about cod, so that he can avoid the bad news about haddock.

I should like also to deal with three other North sea stocks: whiting, saithe and hake. The industry faces a reduction in the whiting TAC of almost 20 per cent. Again, however, the stock remains inside its safe biological limit. May I press the Minister to assure the House that, in the Council tomorrow, he will discuss adjusting industrial by-catches to deal with the whiting situation—just as it has been proposed that part of the solution to the haddock situation might be achieved by re-examining industrial by-catches?

May I press the Under-Secretary also—if he is listening to this important point—to acknowledge and to give the House an undertaking that he will invoke the Hague preference on by-catches and on other crucial matters in which it would be to the benefit of the United Kingdom fishing industry to do so? There is a very strong feeling in the industry about that matter. I should be grateful if, in his reply, he would say on which matters the Hague preference will be invoked.

Will the hon. Gentleman also comment on saithe? Again, there is a sizeable reduction, from 115,000 tonnes to 97,000 tonnes. The industry feels that, in trying to

for saithe. That brings the issue of discards—which I know is of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill)—into sharper focus.

When the Minister has studied the figures for the western Scotland waters, he will be aware that some of the small quotas in that area produce precisely the opposite effect. Reducing pressure mathematically results in increased pressure biologically and increased discard rates. That issue also requires a great deal of care.

I should like to raise two matters, one connected with herring and the other with horse mackerel. The Parliamentary Secretary said nothing about a significant change that resulted from discussions between the European Union and Norway. For the first time, the Norwegians have secured a permanent stock share of 29 per cent. of the herring in the North sea. *[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs, but if he had had meetings with the industry, he would not have been laughing when that point was raised. I would not like the Minister to damage his reputation with the industry by laughing.

Mr. Morley: I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that it was an ironic laugh, given that that disadvantageous agreement was reached by the Conservative Government.

Mr. Jack: The present Government have been in power for nearly eight months. The Minister cannot for ever go back in time. I remind him that we are now eight months into the current fishing year. He has the responsibility of negotiating for the United Kingdom at the Council meeting tomorrow and raising matters on behalf of the UK industry. The industry has suggested that he was a little lax in that agreement, and that 29 per cent. is too high. He may like to comment on that.

Will the Minister tell the House whether he will probe the basis of introducing TAC for horse mackerel for the first time? He will be aware of the concerns over the misrecording of those stocks and he will understand that when those stocks come to be allocated by the Commission, catch recordings and the historic track record are crucial. The industry would like his assurance that the matter will be addressed.

There is concern that, in certain cases, mackerel may well have been recorded as horse mackerel. The matter obviously needs clearing up. They may be points of detail, but, if they are not properly evaluated at this stage, we will not get a result in the amount of fish available to the UK that will help our industry to be viable. When the Minister issues his written parliamentary answer giving us the results—it would be too much to ask him to make a statement to the House—we shall need to know what he has achieved, to hold him accountable for his stewardship of these matters.

A moment ago, I mentioned area VI in the west of Scotland. Will the Minister consider extremely carefully the stocks there—particularly the stocks of cod and whiting? The industry feels strongly that the result in that area will increase discards. The Mallaig fishermen undertook a scientific calculation which shows that nearly 4,000 tonnes of saithe could be dumped in pursuit of meeting the narrow, limited and reduced quotas that are on offer. I should be grateful if the Minister would consider cod, whiting and saithe in the context of my remarks. In respect of whiting and saithe, will he give [illegible]

In the context of the seas around the shores of western Scotland, what will the Minister do to address the blatant manipulation by the Dutch during their presidency in achieving the result on Atlanto-Scandian herring? There is a real need for the UK to return to the issue and get the quotas sorted out. The industry feels very strongly that, in the nicest sense, the UK was taken to the cleaners on that matter. It would like to know what the Minister will do in the negotiations to try to put matters right.

Mr. Salmond: Which Government were in power when the United Kingdom was taken to the cleaners on that vital matter of herring?

Mr. Jack: I am looking to what the Minister can do in negotiations. I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, who will know of the Scottish industry's strong feelings, chooses to chastise me.

What will the Minister do about Irish sea haddock? It has come to the notice of the industry that that stock is now abundant. I should be grateful if he gave a commentary on how we will approach negotiations on the haddock quota in the Irish sea. The industry feels that the science of the cod stocks in that area has improved. Egg surveys, for example, which clearly affect the spawning stock biomass in that part of the ocean, are now positive, after being gloomy. I should be pleased to know whether the Minister will look at that matter.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) is present and will no doubt be advocating the same line on behalf of fishermen in Fleetwood. They have not had the easiest of times, so some reflection in our quotas of the improvement in cod and haddock stocks in the Irish sea would be much appreciated.

Will the Minister consider several other matters concerning stocks? Whiting in area VIIa is again above its safe biological level, and a reduction is proposed. I should be grateful if the Minister looked again at industry representations on that and told us precisely what he will do.

I draw the Minister's attention to an anomaly in channel stocks of cod. The discussion at the beginning of the debate illustrated the fact that the quantity of North sea cod has increased. He will know that, biologically, parts of the channel stocks include North sea cod. Yet, bizarrely, due to the way in which the ICES areas are broken down, some aspects of the channel cod quotas are going down, while other parts of the same North sea stock are going up. The industry would be pleased to know whether the Minister will argue for consistency. It would also be grateful if the Minister considered plaice and sole stocks in that context.

May I raise a point that I outlined at the beginning of my remarks on the difficulties of some Essex fishermen in the Thames estuary who are trying to scratch a living by fishing sole? When I held the Minister's portfolio, I battled with that problem. I have great sympathy for fishermen in the non-sector who are facing extinction due to the very small quantities of sole. Will the Minister please have another look at that problem on behalf of those fishermen? Perhaps a new fishing regime is required; perhaps one that mirrors the cockles regime, which works extremely well for the Thames fishermen. The matter must be looked at very carefully.

[illegible]

[Mr. Jack]

take account of the fact that the reductions in TAC stocks of angler fish, megrim and whiting, which are taken together in a mixed fishery, will lead to an increase in discards in the next fishing period, not a reduction in fishing mortality? That mixture underpins the fishery in area VII and it is important that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland replies to that point.

I should be grateful if the Minister acknowledged some of the concerns expressed in the interventions in his speech by several hon. Members when he commented about the areas for sand eels, megrim, monkfish, turbot, skate, rays and mixed flatfish in the North sea where new TACs will be imposed.

The industry is worried that the basis for the determination of those TACs will not be the full catch from 1996. Questions of misrecording must also be addressed and some proper scientific research undertaken in area VI to discover whether the figures are worth the paper they are printed on. Those are important points for the industry and I should be grateful if the Minister would consider them carefully.

On the broader issues, the Minister regaled us a moment ago with the situation on MAGP IV. He gave us a lot of detail and it was the first definitive reply to representations made on the matter by the industry in its letter of 23 September. The industry had been concerned by the lack of a reply and I hope that the Minister who is to reply will give an assurance that definitive responses will be sent to the industry's communications.

I was interested to read the comments of the Minister of Transport who, speaking from the Opposition Front Bench this time last year, told the House:

"I will protect the UK fishing industry and ensure that we continue with our basic premise—that there will be no further reduction in UK fishing capacity or fishing effort until the whole issue of quota hoppers is resolved. I hope that that is perfectly clear."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. 665.]

It is not clear how the matter of quota hoppers is to be resolved.

The Minister put before the House a list of economic relationships that he hopes to have written into licences. He said nothing about what will be in next year's licences to advance the solution to the problem of quota hoppers. He told us nothing about any legal advice that he has taken on his proposals. That is like Chamberlain returning to the airport at Heston, saying, "I have an agreement", only to find that war broke out soon afterwards.

What legal advice has the Ministry sought to ensure that as soon as the economic relationship requirements are written into a UK licence, the Spanish do not whack the matter into the European Court? If that happens, the potential solution to quota hoppers, which is only a piece of paper at the moment, could be set back for three years. If the solution is set back in the European Court, how can the Minister rely on the assurance given to the House by the Minister of Transport, when he was the Opposition spokesman, that there would be no further reduction in fishing capacity or effort in this country until the matter was resolved? Several issues are still unresolved.

exchange of letters. The economic links, as they were worded, were approved by the Commission and by the President of the Commission. As he and the Commission have responsibilities as guardians of the treaties, that approval counts for a great deal. In previous disputes, such as Factortame and the amendment to the Merchant Shipping Act 1988—when the Government were taken to court and lost—the Commission did not support the Government's approach.

Mr. Jack: It is all right the hon. Gentleman saying that the Commission helped design this set of words, but I understand that the Commission said that it would be happy to receive proposals based on a set of principles. The Government have made proposals, but have not yet subjected them to the testing experience of European law. I will gladly give way to the Minister if he will stand up and say that the Commission's legal advice—or, indeed, the legal advice available to the Council—has said definitively that these proposals are not able to be challenged in the European Court. Has he had any bilateral discussions with Spain and received an assurance from that country that it for one will not challenge us on the proposals?

Mr. Morley: Those discussions are still taking place with the Commission. Nevertheless, the wording will be agreed with the advice of the Commission, which is the guardian of the treaty. No matter how one words any licence condition, there is no guarantee that any member state or individual will not take one to court. We have to ensure that the conditions we put forward are in line with European law, and we are confident we can do that.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for confirming to the House that there is no guarantee that these measures will work. That is very significant. *[Interruption.]* I will give way again to the Minister if he wants to clarify his words, but he has admitted in open debate in the House that there is no guarantee that the discussions are continuing, and he has not had the benefit of an opinion from the Commission, the Council or anybody else. He has had no bilateral talks with Spain to discuss the issue. At the moment, all we have is a series of paper proposals which may or may not deal with the issue. We have no indication of the Minister's fall-back position.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): May I inform the right hon. Gentleman that these measures on the economic link are working? Fishermen in my constituency have told me that one of the quota hoppers has taken on two British fishermen, when they did not take on fishermen before.

Mr. Jack: That is very interesting. When representatives of the industry talked to me, one of the concerns they expressed was the seducing away of fishermen from the British industry to work, for example, on Dutch boats. That is the industry's concern—not mine. The hon. Gentleman says that the measures are working, but he may find that they do not work because they are not worth the paper on which they are printed. The Minister has made that clear to

in the way in which he is approaching a Minister who has achieved more in a few months than the previous Government achieved in years? Will he give the House a list of the nations that supported his proposal to have a treaty amendment? I should like to know who they were. His Government found no alternative and, although the measure remains to be worked through, this Government have done a lot more in the short period that I have been a Member of Parliament than the right hon. Gentleman achieved when he was a member of the Government.

Mr. Jack: At least we were going for a legally sound approach. I indicated that there was a precedent as, at Maastricht, we achieved an important protocol to the treaty. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made clear how seriously he took the measure when he pointed out what our negotiating stance for the treaty would be. Sadly, the election did not allow him to test that out.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) perhaps shows little understanding of the way in which deals are done in Europe. Sometimes one starts off from a position of being 14-one down. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is currently 14-one down in terms of getting the specified risk materials ban introduced. However, he has persuaded the Commissioners to be on his side. Eventually, he may have to persuade other member states not to mount legal challenges. If he is terribly skilful and has enough time before Christmas, he may be able to cobble together an alliance that will suit his purpose, but when he has had a little more experience of negotiating he will see that sometimes a triumph can emerge from a difficult position, as was often the case when we were responsible for negotiating in Europe.

I do not want to prolong the Minister's agony, but it is clear that he is not able to give the House the assurance that we seek on quota hopping. That underpins his stance on MAGP IV, and he will find that in his rather broad-brush remarks dealing with the industry's requirements he has effectively subcontracted the effort reduction to the industry. He has not told us what specific help he may be able to give, and it is no use his saying that the Government are working within the spending limits of the previous Government, because that excuse runs out at the end of the period for which MAGP IV is required to run.

The Minister knows that there will be considerable concern, especially in the pelagic sector, as a result of what he has said. He knows something about the industry, so he will be aware that much new capacity is being invested in that sector, particularly in Scotland, and that those boats are now staring under-utilisation in the face as a result of what he has said.

I see that the Minister is conducting a private debate, but it is incumbent on him to listen to the points of Conservative Members, who at least are speaking on behalf of the industry. I should be grateful for an assurance that he will hold detailed and meaningful consultations with the industry about implementation and that he will give proper consideration to the economic

looking after the situation, but we managed to avoid compulsion by a sensible decommissioning policy, and he has not.

I have dealt with the paucity of weight behind the Government's position on quota hopping, and the Minister has failed to give us satisfaction on the matter. I seek an assurance from the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland that the Government will properly represent the interests of Scottish share fishermen, in particular, to avoid the excesses of the wholly unnecessary working time directive.

In signing up to the social chapter, the Government led us into this pretty mess, and we should like to think that they might have the sense to keep the fishing industry out of it. The industry has made representations on the matter, and I seek an assurance that Ministers will take it up.

Mr. Godman: The right hon. Gentleman has some reservations about the working time directive, but will he confirm that he supports whole-heartedly the directive concerning the occupational safety of fishermen and acknowledge that, as part of that directive, there is a requirement concerning the carriage of immersion or survival suits? I have campaigned for that for many years, but it was always rejected by his colleagues at the Department of Transport.

Mr. Jack: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's long-standing interest and involvement in, and campaign on, safety matters. We have had exchanges before on the subject, and I hope that I gave him a positive response. I would have to check exactly what I said. I cannot be responsible for what others elsewhere in the then Government said in my absence, but I certainly acknowledge that safety is a key element. The industry is concerned about the implications, and he and I know, from a previous discussion on Scottish share fishermen of two different varieties, that the issue is very important to the people whom he represents.

The Minister talked about enforcement. I should be interested to hear more about that in the reply to the debate. We hear the sabre of enforcement being rattled, but the Minister knows that proper enforcement requires resources, which he has told us that he is stuck for. What is this great package of enforcement? When will he come clean and publish the details? Does he intend to benchmark the efficiency and effectiveness of enforcement?

It is sad that the Minister was not able to confide in us what the United Kingdom's presidency priorities will be.

Mr. Morley: I did.

Mr. Jack: If he did, perhaps I did not hear properly. Perhaps those priorities could be put a little more sharply in focus in the reply to the debate. It would have been helpful if we could have spent a little more time hearing how the United Kingdom will pursue various priorities, because one of those could be the build-up to the reform of the common fisheries policy in 2002.

Crucial issues are to be decided in the coming years,

[Mr. Jack]

I seek an assurance that the Government will find time in the next 12 months for a debate so that we can all discuss some crucial matters about the reform of the common fisheries policy. It is crucial that we should have a clear position as the debate develops. We know the lines of the Commission's views as set out at Greenwich, and the subject is very important indeed.

The Minister has not given the House a clear outline of his policy on quota hopping. The policy on MAGP IV is indistinct and, sadly, we were not told how the Minister envisages the way forward for the common fisheries policy. It will be up to him and his ministerial team to prove whether they have the confidence of the fishing industry. Conservative Members will continue to do our best to ask the questions that are of concern to this vital national asset.

5.16 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his first annual fishing debate. We spent many happy hours sitting behind him on the Opposition Benches when I was in the House previously. I especially welcome the much more constructive way in which these debates are now held; they were certainly bad-tempered, rancorous affairs under the previous Administration, but we are now talking constructively and purposefully about the industry.

In anticipation of his later contribution, I welcome the new Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), to the Front Bench. I think that this is his first appearance there. Like me, he has spent many happy hours in these fishing debates.

I suppose that I should also congratulate the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on his remarks, and especially on the way in which he managed to persuade himself, if no one else, that the Conservative Government had no responsibility for the mess that the fishing industry was put into over the past 18 years; it is a happy delusion, but I hope that he will eventually come out of it.

I was particularly interested in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks on the working time directive. As I recall it, it was introduced under health and safety provisions, not under the social chapter, as he was trying to suggest, and the previous Government had no alternative but to accept it, because it was part of the process of qualified majority voting, which they had accepted with the Single European Act 1985.

I especially welcome the Minister's statement, because it is good to hear such a realistic and constructive approach to the industry. For many years, those of us with fishing constituencies felt as though we were treading water, because the issue had become entangled in the previous Government's obsession with the larger issue of Europe and was not dealt with as a specific subject. We are making progress: I welcome in particular the comments on quotas and I hope that the matter will be successfully concluded at the Council meeting tomorrow. He described the [illegible] tackled. It is now being tackled and I am grateful for my hon. Friend's announcement about progress. Again, it is a difficult package with winners and losers, but there is no doubt that we are making progress.

We all want to see stability in our fishing industry. There was no stability during all my previous years here. It seemed to be one crisis after another as quotas bit deeper and there was conflict about the proper methods to be adopted to reduce or limit effort. We are now taking a coherent approach to the industry and I am pleased with the progress being made.

My constituency interest is in the fish processing side of the industry. Stability is extremely important there. In Aberdeen city, 3,500 jobs depend on the fish processing industry and all those people welcome the progress that is being made. A number of issues facing that industry are causing grave concern and I should like to refer to them.

Fishing is a food industry and there are remarkable similarities between the problems of the fishing industry and the current problems in agriculture. This week seems to have been dominated, certainly in my life, by the food industry. We had meetings yesterday with a beef producer and today we have had contact with the fishing industry.

One of the serious problems facing the processing industry is the European directive requiring the harmonisation of veterinary charges. That is causing immense concern. I was given some examples by the United Kingdom Fish Merchants and Processors Federation. The current charge for 30 consignments of fish is £197, which works out at about £6 per consignment. After 1 January, the figure will leap to £3,423. That is a massive leap in an industry that is fairly fragmented and where there are a large number of small operators.

There is also massive concern about the problem of urban waste water treatment as a result of directive 91/271/EEC. That is the concept of producer pays. The industry is a massive consumer of water and is facing real difficulties as local water authorities apply that directive to local industry.

Another major issue of concern—I have been lobbied on this recently by a number of companies in my constituency and outside—is the problem of imported fish. Our industry uses about 100,000 tonnes of cod a year, but our catch is only about 70,000 tonnes. The extra 30,000 tonnes is imported, the bulk of those imports coming from Russia. As a result of EEC decisions, there are major difficulties in connection with the Russian imports. A number of companies throughout the north-east of Scotland have no other fish but cod from Russia as their staple product.

The regulations that now apply to fish freezer vessels have meant that those vessels are no longer landing fish in the United Kingdom. The industry is finding it difficult to understand why the United Kingdom is applying those regulations much harder and tighter than any other EU country. In particular, we understand that all the other EU countries are still importing Russian fish. I have told the Minister that I want a meeting with him on this matter

product—the processed fish—will then be imported. We shall be eating the same fish as the Government have disqualified. The difference is that the jobs will be in other countries, not just European Union countries. It seems ridiculous for the Government to allow that to continue.

Mr. Doran: I understand that point. It is important to examine the situation. As I understand it, Russian fish is still being imported into other EU countries. It is difficult for fish processors in north-east Scotland to obtain supplies from elsewhere, even at the high prices that some importers are prepared to charge because they know that there is a gap in the market. I would appreciate it if the Minister would comment on that.

I will be brief because I know that many other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I should like to refer to the efforts being made by councils in the north-east of Scotland in relation to the fish industry. The three local authorities in my area—Aberdeen city council, Aberdeenshire council and Moray council—have recently formed a joint fisheries partnership. The aim of that partnership is to improve the area's ability to attract new industry connected with the fishing industry and to improve the safety, the image and the profile of the fishing industry.

The Lord Provost of Aberdeen city council has begun chairing a regular meeting with leading fishing industry figures. The city is contributing to a massive change in the image and servicing of the industry. For example, it has undertaken an improvement in the harbour area, in which the fish processing industry is situated. It is co-operating with the local harbour board to upgrade the Aberdeen fish market, mainly to improve the image but also to introduce health and safety measures that will place the city's facilities among the leaders in Europe in terms of the services provided and the quality of the fish that passes through the market. A new dress code and a new hygiene code have been introduced. The city council has taken the view that it is an important industry for the city. As I have said, about 3,500 fish processing jobs are involved there and the council is making magnificent efforts.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. As I said earlier, it is a novel experience for me, on my return to the House, to find the annual fishing debate to be constructive and reasonable. I hope that that will continue in the future.

5.27 pm

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): In their election manifesto, the Government said that they would work for the reform of the common fisheries policy. For fishing ports such as Bridlington, which I have the honour to represent, that is vital. If there is to be a fishing industry after 2002, we need reform of the CFP.

The Government have been asked on several occasions what they intend to do for fisheries during the United Kingdom presidency. No answer was given by the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but the Parliamentary Secretary did give an answer [illegible] Member for Leeds, to phase out the use of drift nets. We know that the issue of drift nets is important, but when the British fishing industry is collapsing by the day and we are told that during its presidency the UK will concentrate on drift nets, one must question the priorities.

I suppose we should be grateful for the fact that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), was clear about what the Government are doing about reform because he said that there will be no opportunity to revise that fishing policy for some years. That is a lot of hope for the fishing industry.

Following discussions on quota hoppers, the Government have said that they intend to "strengthen the economic benefits" that countries derive from their quotas. It is time that the Government understood that the national allocation of quota is a discriminatory derogation terminating in the year 2002. That is a mistake that we Conservatives made. A derogation cannot be reformed; it simply expires. We are left with the task of trying to obtain a new derogation, which will become increasingly difficult.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman may have been daydreaming when I mentioned the priorities for the UK presidency, which included enforcement, marketing and preparing for the debate on common fisheries policy changes in 2002. The principle of relative stability is not a derogation and will not expire in 2002 unless there is a majority vote against it.

Mr. Townend: The question of fishing up to our coasts is a derogation. The Government say that they will apply effective controls of fishing efforts. That is probably why, in respect of decommissioning, licences have been split from track records. The Government know that the track record is the valuable part and want the industry to decommission itself or fall into foreign hands. Decommissioning is cheap, and will allow the Treasury to meet its targets for economic and monetary union. However, the track record is the fishing effort. Fishing effort will not be reduced by taking a vehicle out of service and allowing the catch allocation to go to others. That is nonsense.

The Minister talked about black fish. Lord Sewel, a Scottish Office Minister, has made it clear that the Government's aim is to clamp down on black fish. We should not forget what black fish are: the over-quota landing of species caught as part of a mixture of species. It is illegal, but what is the alternative? Dumping tens of thousands of fish into the sea to pollute the ocean is not conservation—it is nonsense.

It is Government policy to agree to more effective conservation measures. What went wrong on 30 October when for three species of fish the minimum landing size was reduced well below the breeding size? The reason given, along with the discarding rules, was the need to reduce the quantity of fish discarded—on paper, not in practice. Any fool can reduce discards on paper. One can [illegible] them all if the minimum [illegible]

[Mr. Townend]

discarding rules, the majority would live. It is round fish with swim bladders that die, because their bladders burst coming up through the pressure zone. That is why they float belly up when discarded for seagulls to attack. The Government regard it as acceptable to catch juvenile fish below breeding size because they say that it is wasteful to require the discarding of fish that are unmarketable.

We talk about the common application of the rules. As a member of the Council of Europe and the Western European Union, I go to Strasbourg and Paris regularly. One has only to walk around the fish markets to see the minuscule fish on sale there. The Danes were correct to vote against the conservation measures.

The Government say that they want to improve the way in which quotas are managed. The way the Government are going, there will be no UK quota. Whatever the Minister says, it will cease in 2003 because we shall have a permit system then. We have now accepted that.

Finally, the Government want a greater regional dimension to the CFP. I forecast that that will involve the same regions that the United Kingdom will be broken up into as we become a Europe of regions in a federal state. It is no good giving us nonsense about regional management being the same as coastal state control. The one hands over the competence to organise fisheries to Brussels, which the Government seem to agree with, while the other, which the industry wants, gives the competence to coastal states.

If they are honest, the Government see no possibility of reforming the CFP to the benefit of fishermen. On 11 November in the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, the Minister questioned whether we could get Spain to vote for a package of measures that went directly against its interests.

Mr. Morley: It has a veto.

Mr. Townend: The Minister is right. The answer is that there will be no reform of the CFP for the benefit of the British fishermen. Nor will a further discriminative derogation be obtained, except perhaps for six-mile and partial six to 12-mile limits. The other nations will extract an enormous price from the United Kingdom for those 52 votes.

The Government have failed on another election promise. They are going to let the advantage of the six-month presidency slip through their fingers. They will let the British fishing industry sink because little can be done with 10 votes. They are merely office boys carrying out their master's instructions. For that, they are prepared to see a vital national interest disappear beneath the waves.

There is only one real culprit in the decline of the fishing industry: the European Union. The Minister mentioned that things were not always right in countries outside the CFP. He is correct. The Canadians mishandled the situation off the Newfoundland banks, but at least a nation state can impose a proper management system. If our fishing industry could enjoy the prosperity of those of Norway and Iceland, our fishermen would be much happier. It is a betrayal of this country, of our fishing industry and of a great national resource—

Mr. Mitchell: Who did it?

Mr. Townend: The guilty men are my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and the late Lord Wilson of Rievaulx. One accepted the fisheries policy when we came in and the other refused to deal with it when we renegotiated. Fish are an important national resource. It is nonsense that North sea oil is a British resource but that the fish swimming around the oil rigs are a European resource.

I hate to say this to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), but we lost every fishing seat of any size at the general election, with the exception of mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen). If we are to win those seats back, we must change our policy. We must stop looking at Europe through rose-coloured spectacles. We must accept that our national interest is the repatriation of the CFP.

5.37 pm

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate. It is a privilege to speak in that House. I am proud to represent the people of Castle Point and greatly honoured by their will to have me serve as their Member of Parliament.

In 1992, my predecessor, Robert Spink, became Member of Parliament for what was considered a safe Conservative seat. He became a parliamentary private secretary and I know that he looked forward to a long parliamentary career. Despite his deep disappointment at losing his seat, he was gracious in defeat. He was the first to shake my hand after the result and I wish to put on record my respect for the dignity that he accorded public life that night.

I also pay tribute to Lord Braine of Wheatley, a former Father of the House, whom many of my constituents remember with affection simply as Bernard Braine. He was a Member of Parliament for more than 40 years, withstanding the boundary changes that saw the creation of the new seat of Castle Point from the former Essex, South-East constituency.

I would not like to forget another of my predecessors, Captain Ray Gunter. He was first elected to Parliament in the Labour landslide of 1945. Ray's service to this country during the second world war, his commitment to his constituents throughout his time as a Member of Parliament, and his later contribution to the trades union movement have become an outstanding testimony to his belief in a better future. From that line, I am the first Labour Member of Parliament in almost half a century to represent South Benfleet, Thundersley, Hadleigh and Canvey Island, all of which form the constituency of Castle Point.

The constituency of Castle Point and Castle Point borough council were created on conterminous boundaries in the 1970s. Their name is derived from the well-known landmarks of Hadleigh castle and Canvey point. My constituency lies along the east side of the Thames estuary. It is within the port of London, but just outside the Thames corridor. It has grown from tiny townships

and villages to a present population of about 85,000 people. Its rapid post-war growth has been due in no small measure to the resettlement of people from east and north London, who wanted to live in more pleasant surroundings without entirely breaking their links with London. Every day, the London-Tilbury-Southend line carries thousands of my constituents in and out of London to work.

Castle Point now forms part of the larger conurbation of south-east Essex. Its post-war history has defined it primarily as a commuting area, without large-scale industry or commerce. It has one of the highest rates of home ownership and dependency on the private motor car in England. It has grown, however, and been left to get on as best it may without any foreseen need for help or intervention.

The time for change has come. Our roads are bursting at the seams; our young people need more help into training and post-16 education opportunities; we cannot meet the demand for affordable homes to rent; and 55 per cent. of our work force have to travel out of the area to make a living. Most of all, Castle Point needs a better balance between employment opportunities, patterns of transport and housing and amenity provision. I look forward to the challenge of renewal and regeneration while protecting those assets that we hold dear.

One of the jewels in our crown must surely be the ancient ruins of Hadleigh castle, which are perched high on the downs above Benfleet Creek. It offers unparalleled views over much of my constituency and across the river Thames to the fields of Kent. To the west of the castle, the great oil refineries of Shell and BP at Coryton dominate the flat landscape of Canvey Island. To the east, beyond the grazing marshes and saltings, is the wider estuary and the southern North sea. Whatever the season, it is always a wonderful place to be. Such an abrupt meeting of times past and present gives pause for thought to the future.

From that high point one can see, morning and evening, slowly moving convoys of cars attempting the daily journey to and from work. One can also make out the vast areas of housing on Canvey Island, developed from the old plotlands in a piecemeal approach to planning which is the bane of its current residents. My constituents know what it is to suffer from poor planning. We treasure the benefits that we have accrued through foresight and we bemoan the effects of the lack of it.

Hadleigh castle stands proud as a symbol of the indomitable spirit of the people who live in my constituency. They want changes that can bring a better quality of life and a more sustainable future. No borough can achieve on its own solutions to problems that have a regional dimension, be they connected with transport, planning or economic development. That is why I have such an unshakable belief in the invaluable support that a regional development agency, working within a national policy framework, can offer to smaller districts.

Castle Point needs to attract investment to provide work for a mix of skills and age groups. Through the local plan, we are beginning the process of regeneration. Acres of derelict land on Canvey Island are now designated for retail employment use and for amenity and environmental upgrading. An outward and forward-looking approach has been the key to that new planning framework. It is an approach that recognises the inherent possibilities within one's own area, understands its needs and looks for partners in a mutual venture.

A pressing task before us all is the creation of jobs within a sustainable economic and environmental future. It is no mean task, but I am excited by the steps that the Government are taking. At last, we have leadership aimed at the longer-term economic policy; we have leadership in transport; at last, we have leadership in tackling environmental problems at home and abroad; and at long last, we have a Britain that recognises the value of its people through its employment, training and education policies. The framework we are now setting nationally will give confidence to putative investors who are looking for stable economic conditions, good industrial relations, a skilled work force and a fine place to locate.

Change does not necessarily mean replacement. It is also about the growth of indigenous enterprise, renewed effort towards worthwhile conservation and a greater respect for nature and heritage.

Besides the container vessels and barges trading in the Port of London there are still small fishing boats, the defiant remains of a beleaguered industry. It is one of our oldest industries, which dates back to Saxon times, and we are determined to keep it and strengthen it. Fishing on the Thames will not survive without a joint approach, and that is why the inshore fishermen of Castle Point, along with those from Kent and the rest of Essex, are as one behind the strategy for coastal state management.

We owe a great deal to our intrepid fishermen, who refused to give in when their living became so precarious. They are encouraged by the efforts now being made on their behalf by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I know that there is a common understanding of the best way forward. As in many other policy areas, the watchword must be sustainability. That means better management of inshore fisheries and ecosystems so that in the long term we are replenishing stock and not decimating it through an outdated and inadequate approach that had more to do with political trade-offs than science and common sense.

The new approach must be based on co-operation within the industry between member states. There are signs that that is beginning to happen and I hope that sound arguments will eventually win everywhere.

I am encouraged by what my hon. Friend the Minister has had to say today. He has offered us an improvement on what we had and an improvement on what some might have expected. I am particularly encouraged by his focus on several dimensions that are important to fisheries policy. For example, I am encouraged by a sound approach designed to improve standards of enforcement, which will include better monitoring and tougher policies. I am also encouraged by the much more holistic approach to stock management than we have seen before and the more positive yet resolute approach within Europe.

I am delighted to have been included in this debate. I wish my hon. Friend well as he negotiates for British fishermen agreements based on sustainability and better enforcement in days to come.

5.47 pm

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): I am honoured to be the first to congratulate the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on her first-class maiden speech. I do not

[Mr. Andrew George]

know that part of the country well, but I gained a clear impression not only of the eyesores but of the attractions of her constituency. I am sure that she will make a good job of representing the people of that area. I share her enthusiasm for protecting the interests of the inshore fishing fleet. She was right to emphasise the importance of that.

I should also like to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on introducing this annual debate for the first time as Minister with responsibility for the fisheries. I join him in congratulating the industry on continuing to make constructive suggestions and on entering into constructive dialogue with the Government and the Opposition parties to bring forward positive proposals for future development of the industry. I welcome much but not all of what the Minister brought us in his statement, but I certainly welcome efforts to control industrial fishing—something which the industry has long looked for.

A fundamental point that will emerge from the debate, and which the Minister must recognise, is the fact that the industry will not welcome his proposals for the pelagic sector, as they will have a devastating impact on it. It is important that no rash decisions are made on the pelagic sector. The Minister must discuss the matter with the industry and make progress on the exchange of letters about quota hopping that he mentioned earlier. He must do that before he makes a final decision and statement on the future for the pelagic sector under MAGP IV.

The memorandum that underlies the debate—and indeed the debate itself so far—reads like a mouthwatering medley of fish from the menu of the many highly acclaimed fish restaurants in Cornwall. I strongly recommend that right hon. and hon. Members present visit the many and various restaurants there.

Mr. Jack: Which ones?

Mr. George: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman after the debate. This is not an opportunity to advertise specific restaurants. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, go on."] I recommend hon. Members to come to my part of the country and enjoy the many high-quality fish restaurants there. No doubt such restaurants are not confined to Cornwall but exist throughout the United Kingdom. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) has already read, covered, digested and repeated much of the briefing from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. There is much detail about the proposed amendments to the total allowable catches for each species, on which the Minister will negotiate tomorrow. It is not possible to go through every aspect of that again.

I agree with much of what the right hon. Member for Fylde said about the inconsistencies in some of the proposed advice, but I cannot agree with the Conservative amendment. As we are supposed to be living in a country that has not only a new Labour new Government but—as from this autumn, I understand—a new and apologetic Conservative party, is it appropriate for the Conservatives to debate fishing in the House without first offering an apology for its treatment of the fishing industry in past years?

There are some important points of principle concerning the proposals for total allowable catches. I shall mention two. The first is the scientists' two-dimensional assessment of the way in which the fishing industry operates. Much of the science is based on single-species assessment and fails properly to recognise the reality of a mixed-catch industry.

That is nothing new. If I may draw the attention of the House to my part of the world again, I might mention that next week in Mousehole we shall be celebrating what is called Tom Bawcock's Eve. At this time of year, west Cornwall celebrates the time when, after starvation and poverty because of storms in the western approaches, Tom Bawcock went out from Mousehole, braved the storms and brought back seven sorts of fish. There are songs to remember that time and to celebrate the seven sorts of fish that he brought back. The occasion will be celebrated next week in the village, with the baking of many stargazy pies. I am sure that the Minister will know about them; the fishes' faces poke out of the pie.

Things have not changed, so science must develop more to reflect the realities of the industry. I believe that the Minister is aware of that. It is important that the scientific assessment of the way in which the industry operates should develop and become more sophisticated, to reflect the fact that many fishermen now rely on what we know as mixed catches and that it is difficult to direct oneself at one particular species.

It is also difficult to react to changes in the quota that are too dramatic—and there are some dramatic changes in the proposed total allowable catches that the Minister has announced. We need a longer-term perspective on stocks. There may be a 40 per cent. floor for TAC reductions, but the Minister must recognise that 40 per cent. represents a massive swing—a massive cut—for the affected fishermen. Short-term stock assessments lead to what the industry perceives as imperfect and erratic advice.

As the right hon. Member for Fylde said, there are sometimes erratic interpretations in connection with the proposals for cod and haddock in the North sea. There are many mixed fisheries and, as has been mentioned in connection with the west coast of Scotland saithe, they may be forced to respond simply by altering their discard levels. That will not necessarily reduce mortality rates even if it succeeds in reducing catch rates. I hope that the Minister will appreciate that that is an important point to take to the negotiations with his colleagues in Europe tomorrow. He should seek to redress that balance and deal with the problems that will inevitably arise.

For example, in area VII, at the port of Newlyn in my constituency, the potential loss of up to 40 per cent. of the megrim catch will mean that up to £1.3 million will go out of the local economy. Moreover, megrim underpin a wide range of mixed fisheries. That elaborates on the point that I made earlier. Not only will £1.3 million be lost to the local economy—directly to British fishermen—but there will be a knock-on effect in the local community.

Meanwhile, it has been announced today that in the Penzance and St. Ives travel-to-work areas in west Cornwall there has been a further 15 per cent. increase in unemployment. In other parts of the country, unemployment is ostensibly falling and there is a problem of overheating, even in the so-called south-west region,

of which Cornwall does not see itself as properly a part. In Cornwall, we still face the problem of continuing high and increasing unemployment. The news will hit the economy of west Cornwall harder than most other areas.

We shall have to look more closely at the Minister's statement on MAGP IV. I note that he did not use the phrase "days at sea" to describe effort control in the pelagic sector, but he must accept that there are implications for that sector and that, as a result of his proposals, days at sea could be restricted.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) made the point effectively that, by using the review clause at the end of 1999, there will be an opportunity to review whether it is appropriate to manage the pelagic sector in that way. I know that the industry shares my concern about days at sea restrictions. If that is on the agenda, the Minister should realise that the pelagic fleet cannot be restricted in that way, because it must search grounds for days—even weeks—before it can start fishing. Such controls would be artificial, inappropriate and contradictory when the western mackerel stocks are to increase by up to 20 per cent.

I hope that the Minister accepts that decommissioning has been unequal across the fleet. Not only has there been a lack of pelagic involvement, but only two of the 600 vessels that have been decommissioned were Anglo-Spanish. What conclusions does the Minister draw from that? What action should we take?

That brings me to the issue of quota hoppers. The industry wants to know a great deal more about how the Government intend to deal with that problem. We must find a practical solution and not merely play games that fuel Europhobia or xenophobia. The Government should push this point very hard and use the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union to pursue the matter with great vigour.

We still do not know what progress has been made following the exchange of letters. I listened carefully to the Minister. He referred to the 1998 licences and suggested including clauses on the horsepower of boats. Clauses on the economic connection of boat to port could also be included. It is essential not to lose the opportunity to make progress, because this problem undermines the confidence of the industry and of British fishermen. We want to know what provisions the licences will contain and how soon such new clauses could be included. How does the Minister intend to implement and enforce his proposals? What is the likelihood of a legal challenge? How much support is there among other EU nations? What time scale does he propose? I hope that he will deal with those points in his winding-up speech, because the industry wants to know a great deal more.

I welcome the proposal to relate concerns about fishing management on a sustainable basis to the important issue of marine safety. I am deeply saddened to have brought to the House's attention the fishing tragedies that have occurred across the country. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) recently raised that issue to some effect.

I welcomed the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who is responsible for shipping, while the Minister was making his statement. There should be increasing co-operation with colleagues in that Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and in the Department of Trade and Industry, given its role in registering the telecommunications agency.

This year, 11 lives have been lost at sea in the fishing industry. That is the seriousness of the problem in my constituency: we lose more lives at sea than on the roads. The problem is not just with the management of the industry, but with the management of sea safety. Four men have been missing for more than a month. They were on the Margaretha Maria, which is 75 ft trawler from Newlyn. The families of those men will be facing their first Christmas without their father or their husband. It is an incredibly difficult time, and sadly such incidents have occurred all too often. It is important for the Minister to work with his colleagues to find practical solutions to those problems.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Is my hon. Friend aware that the fishing industry in Scotland is voicing great concern about the proposed closure of the Oban coastguard station and the Pentland station in the constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)? I hope that the Fisheries Minister will be involved, on behalf of fishermen, in the consultation process that the Shipping Minister announced yesterday.

Mr. George: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention, because it amplifies and supports my point. This problem should not be seen merely as a coastguard management issue, because it affects the management of the industry and it has a knock-on effect on sea safety. St. Ives has lost a number of coastguard look-outs in recent years, and that greatly concerns people in the industry.

The abortive attempt to produce a new code of practice for under 12 m vessels shows the importance of cross-departmental co-operation. Those proposals have gone back to the drawing board, but had there been greater interdepartmental co-operation and had the industry been able to give advice, we would have made progress on a new code of practice for marine safety.

The Minister mentioned the importance of developing still further satellite surveillance programmes. There is a connection, because it is not just a problem of fishing management, but of sea safety. An appropriate and well-managed expansion of the use of satellite surveillance will be of great interest to the Minister's colleagues in other Departments.

The debate should concentrate on and draw attention to the major and golden opportunity for Britain to push forward with and set the agenda for the reform of the common fisheries policy—and my goodness it needs reform.

Mr. Gill: In earlier fishing debates, the hon. Gentleman spoke about reform of the common fisheries policy. Has he considered that it is virtually impossible to get any meaningful reform of that policy because it is almost impossible to get enough nations to support radical proposals? The hon. Gentleman speaks of reform, but does he not appreciate that that is a complete cop-out?

Mr. George: That was a fascinating intervention. Meanwhile, back in the real world—

Mr. Gill: Tell us how we can get reform.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

Mr. George: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. George]

One sure fire way to ensure that we do not get the co-operation of our European colleagues is to take the hon. Gentleman's attitude. If such attitudes prevail, obstacles will continue to be placed in our way.

Mr. Salmond: Of course it is difficult to get member states to agree, but not long ago the Spanish Government managed to get our Government's support for accelerated access to western waters. If there can be movement one way can there not be movement in the other?

Mr. George: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is appropriate. Perhaps supporters of the previous Government should bear that point in mind when they speak about securing a better future for British fishermen. They should ask themselves why the Spanish fleet got access to western waters six years before there was any need for that fleet to have it. I should like to make progress because I know that other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate.

As the Minister has said, if the common fisheries policy, with all its faults, did not exist, some international agreement or pan-European co-operation would be needed for fishing in international waters. In pursuing an agenda for the reform of the common fisheries policy during our six-months presidency, I hope that the Minister and the Government will not stand back with the usual British sense of fair play but will be robust in their efforts to secure fair play for British fishermen.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George: No, because I want to make progress.

The agenda for reform must include equality in monitoring and enforcement by member states, and transparency in implementation by member states of MAGP IV. It must secure a practical solution to the issue of quota hopping and set an agenda for effective reform of the policy on the principles of sustainability, decentralisation, equality of monitoring and enforcement. It must promote and protect the interests of our inshore fleet.

The Minister spoke about the need to decommission the tuna drift net fishery. I have raised the matter with him before. Such decommissioning can happen only if the Minister recognises that there must be adequate compensation and retraining to ensure that people are not pushed out of fishing altogether but are allowed to develop other forms of fishing. They are pursuing species that are off quota.

Mr. Hayes: I was inspired to re-enter the Chamber by the length and honesty of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I must press him on how robust he is prepared to be. He spoke about a more robust approach and has given illustrations. His Cornish fishermen and mine in Lincolnshire will want to know how robust he and his party are prepared to be. For example, would they be prepared to say that there will be no treaty without an end to quota hopping? It is fine to play the game of being robust but people want to know how far the Liberal Democrats and people such as the hon. Gentleman are prepared to go in defence of the national interest.

Mr. George: My party would not support the hon. Gentleman's proposal. We took the seat in St. Ives because of Conservative Europhobia and Euroscepticism and not in spite of them. People have seen through that line.

I should like to draw attention to the importance of protecting the inshore fishery. Significantly, the south-west mackerel handline fishery in Cornwall closed down last night. The irony is that it is the most sustainable of all fisheries and such closures should not happen. If that fishery cannot be taken off quota, with conditions, which is what I should like, the Minister must hold back or set aside quota that can be made available later in the year if it is needed. I hope that he will address the importance of protecting not only the inshore fleet and the artisan fleet but the mackerel handliners which are the most sustainable of all fisheries.

We urge the Government forcefully to press for the optimum fishing opportunities for British fishermen and to base their demands on sustainable management, effective enforcement and a recognition of regional differences in the fisheries. In this traditional annual debate on the industry, we ask the Government to recognise their obligation to drive forward the fishing debate during their presidency to ensure equality of monitoring and enforcement by member states and transparency in the implementation of MAGP IV. They should clarify with the industry progress on the exchange of letters about quota hopping. We must set the agenda for the reform of the common fisheries policy and ensure that it is based on a decentralised system. We must incorporate closed areas, make effective use of satellite surveillance and protect the inshore industry.

I have raised some technical points on next year's proposed tax and I encourage the Minister to listen closely to the industry's views on his proposals. He should recognise the potentially devastating impact of those proposals on the pelagic sector and discuss that with the industry before he implements them. The next six months will present Britain with a golden opportunity to drive forward the necessary reforms to the common fisheries policy. We cannot afford to lose that opportunity.

6.18 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I compliment my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on a fine maiden speech. I wish her many years of fruitful labour on behalf of her constituents, whom I have no doubt she will ably represent.

The Minister's opening speech was the proverbial curate's egg. Much was welcome, but some aspects caused great concern. On behalf of the Northern Ireland fishing industry, I particularly welcome the lack of further reduction in the demersal and nephrops fleet, and the apparent abandonment of the concept of limitation of days at sea. In the limited time that the House expects one to impose by self-discipline, I shall refer only to matters that particularly affect Northern Ireland fishing.

I remind the Minister that the Northern Ireland fishing industry is especially vulnerable in two aspects. First, it has already done its share in terms of conservation and the development of fishing stocks by contributing, from its own resources, a 40 per cent. reduction in fishing effort over the past few years. We would like the other members of the European Union to catch up before any further obstacles are put in the way of our local fishing fleets.

The industry in Northern Ireland is basically a coastal industry, mainly confined to the Irish sea. The communities that foster the ports of Kilkeel, Ardglass and

Portavogie are totally dependent on it, and if the fishing industry were to collapse, so would those communities. There is no other sustainable employment in those areas, so this is not a matter of a potential threat to one specific economic sector, but a threat to the entire economic life of such areas. That is why I emphasise the contribution already made to conservation by the Northern Ireland fishing fleet, and hope that sympathetic consideration will be given to further development of the industry, which is currently on a knife edge.

Of particular concern to the Northern Ireland fishing fleet is whiting in area VIIa. It would seem that, during 1997, fishermen have consistently reported large shoals in the western Irish sea. I know as well as anyone what a fisherman's tale can be, and, in reality, that is almost an unprovable experience.

Scientifically speaking, Irish sea whiting has been on a roller coaster for the past few years. In 1996, the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management recommended an increase of 22.5 per cent. in the total allowable catch; and for 1997, it recommended a cut of 28 per cent. Unfortunately, the scientific community now recommends a cut in the TAC for 1998 of about 49 per cent., from the present 7,500 tonnes to 3,800, although I know that that suggestion has been mitigated by the European Commission to a reduced level of 4,500 tonnes.

I cannot understand what made the ACFM and the European Commission take that course when, according to the ACFM, the stock is considered to be within safe biological limits and spawning stock biomass appears to be stable. If the ACFM says that, why is it recommending a 49 per cent. cut? That requires immediate further investigation. Irish sea haddock in area VII also seems to be more common than scientific evidence would suggest. The restrictions are imposed because of scientific evidence that seems to be at variance with the experience of local fishermen.

Although herring fishing is not a major factor in the overall industry, the local fleet is nevertheless facing a considerable and continuing problem relating to the closure of the Douglas box off the south-east coast of the Isle of Man. If some effort were made by the Minister and his Ministry to reduce the time and the extent of the closure, it might provide an alternative crop for local fishermen in Northern Ireland.

The other question I shall briefly address is the Hague preference—that annual problem afflicting Northern Ireland fishermen in particular. As in previous years, it is likely that the Government of the Republic of Ireland will invoke the Hague preference in respect of Irish sea cod, whiting and plaice. Given that an extremely low whiting TAC is likely to be set, that will mean even further erosion of the UK's Irish sea whiting allocation, and also the probability that the Republic of Ireland will have less whiting to swap in the coming season.

Will the Minister address that problem, which might be resolved by way of bilateral agreement between the UK Government and that of the Republic of Ireland? It should be possible to come to some rational arrangement that could be automatically put in train year by year, rather than the Dutch option, which offers unpredictability year after year.

I should also like to draw the Minister's attention to regional specialisation in the Northern Ireland fishing industry. I am not asking for special treatment for Northern Ireland's industry, as distinct from that of the UK, but for it to be looked at separately, in the sense that it has a dimension separate from that of certain other UK regions.

As I said, Northern Ireland's fishing industry is predominantly coastal, but it has been scientifically recognised that Northern Ireland's fishing grounds contain a biomass unique in European coastal waters. The confluence of the seas, both north and south, create unique conditions that have never really been recognised in terms of the availability of species within the main fishing grounds of the Northern Ireland fleet. Will the Minister take that aboard as a separate subject for investigation?

I remind the Minister of a statement made in 1992 in a European Commission report, "Regional Socio-economic Studies in the Fishing Sector". That report said in respect of Northern Ireland:

> "There are currently very few alternative employment opportunities. Perhaps this is the one area where the maintenance of fish and the related industry employment should be a priority."

In that context, and in view of the coastal nature of the Northern Ireland fishing fleet and the unique breeding and fishing grounds, will the Minister look at the possibility not of giving our fleet special treatment, but of making it the subject of separate assessment, distinct from other regions in the UK, in order to see whether a different viability attaches to the Northern Ireland industry?

Those are the highlights of the non-national points I wish to make. Time allows me only to pinpoint them on behalf of the Northern Ireland fishing industry. I should like to think that, when he goes to Brussels—I think tomorrow—the Minister will be accompanied by his noble Friend Lord Dubs, who is the Minister in the Northern Ireland Office responsible for agriculture and fisheries. That practice has proved successful in previous years, and I should be disappointed if Lord Dubs were not personally present to sustain and advance the special interests of the Northern Ireland fishing industry.

Finally, I ask again whether there can be a bilateral arrangement with the Republic of Ireland in respect of the transfer and swapping of quotas with the Northern Ireland fishing fleet, so as to allow a more measured and more permanent relationship in terms of that specific variation of the invoking of the Hague preference.

6.29 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on her maiden speech. When she rose to speak, I and the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) hastily compared notes to find out where Castle Point was. We need not have bothered, because in her excellent speech she gave us a tour d'horizon of her constituency. Those in the Chamber who did not know where Castle Point was, should now be very familiar with it because of the hon. Lady's eloquent speech about her constituency.

It is fair to say that fishing is not the dominant concern in the hon. Lady's constituency—but having achieved a 17 per cent. swing at the election, she is obviously excellent at fishing for votes. If she turns in more performances like this evening's, I am sure that her constituents will reward her with continuing and even more comfortable majorities.

I thank the Minister for his kind remarks about the loss of the Sapphire. I have said some deservedly harsh things about two of his Government colleagues because of their

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

attitude to my constituents in this tragedy—but they would not apply to the Minister, who has a tremendous depth of knowledge of and is sincere about the fishing industry. His remarks were gratefully received and appreciated, and I will relay them to my constituents.

I suspect that the Minister has argued for a decent amount of time for this debate, so it is important that Front and Back Benchers show some restraint, to ensure that everyone who wants to speak gets the opportunity. I shall quickly run through a number of the points made in the debate and then raise two main points of concern, which I am sure the Minister will want to answer.

First, in an intervention in the Minister's speech, I raised the issue of the cod and haddock quotas. There is a clear inconsistency in the scientific treatment of those species. It is vital for the confidence that working fishermen have in scientific advice that the Minister clarifies the matter. From his quite sympathetic response, I take it that he will work to secure some improvement in the North sea haddock quota. A number of devices are available to him in the negotiations, so I send him off to them with the plea that he seriously considers the matter, as there appears to be a virtually inexplicable difference in the treatment of those species in the North sea.

Secondly, I hope that the Minister will confirm that there are a number of species in the North sea—whiting—and off the west coast where the Hague preference could be invoked. It is vital that it is invoked. That concession was won for the United Kingdom by the then Irish Foreign Minister, later Taoiseach, Garret Fitzgerald in 1976—if my memory serves me right. It has been extremely useful with a number of species over the years, so it should be well oiled and kept in use. I hope that it will be invoked in the negotiations for the relevant stocks.

Mr. Morley: On the hon. Gentleman's question about North sea haddock and the scientific difference in the treatment of cod and haddock, my information is that the increase in the North sea cod TAC reflects the considerable reduction in cod fishing in recent years. There has been an increase for haddock, and the TAC is now 115,000 tonnes, which is 5,000 tonnes more than the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management suggested. There has also been agreement on an increased quota transfer with Norway for haddock. On the hon. Gentleman's point about adjusting the quota by further adjusting industrial by-catch assumptions, that is something that we will do in the Council. I hope that that answers his points.

Mr. Salmond: I welcome that information, and I will leave the matter to the Minister, given his sympathetic response.

A number of issues have not been mentioned in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has been pursuing the question of the exclusion order that affected the Moray firth fishery. The difficulty appears to be that, although we have always had the principle of the polluter pays, in this case it has become impossible to identify the polluter. As a result, the fishing industry has had great difficulty with its compensations claims.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): This is a matter of deep concern, which must be dealt with by the Government. The oil and gas industries in the North sea are obviously important as well. However, where fishermen do not have the facility to claim compensation, could the oil companies establish a contingency fund to help? It is an important matter for the fishermen in my area.

Mr. Salmond: I shall relay my hon. Friend's question to the Minister; I am sure that he will answer it when he replies to the debate. I rely on my hon. Friend's ingenuity in these matters to get her point across.

Another point that I wish to raise cropped up earlier in the debate, in the remarkable, amnesiac speech of the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). The Conservative party has got a grip on the fact that the Government have been in office for seven months, but it seems to have forgotten the 18 preceding years. The claim is that the UK has been taken to the cleaners over the Atlanto-Scandian herring distribution—and that is correct. However, as I pointed out earlier, it was a Conservative Government who were first taken to the cleaners.

I want to raise with the Minister the obvious point that it was the efforts of the Scottish pelagic fleet—which, on the basis of the Minister's remarks, will be under great pressure—that secured 30 per cent. of the whole European quota of the new stock coming into use. Therefore, to get only 19 per cent. of the quota allocation seems a considerable gap. Perhaps the Minister will use his good offices to argue that point strongly, especially given the pressures on the pelagic fleet.

I could raise a whole range of other issues, but they have already been dealt with by other hon. Members. I want to concentrate on two main issues, one of which arises directly from the Minister's statement. The other relates to the UK presidency, European representation and the way forward.

On the question of MAGP IV, apart from saying, as other Ministers have, that Tory spending plans have left this Government in a straitjacket, the Minister did not quite make an argument that this part of the Opposition could accept—or, I suspect, many of the Government's Back Benchers. The good news for the white fish fleet in the near-achievement of MAGP IV targets is that that should open the door once again to structural funding.

Scotland is at the cutting edge of the UK fishing fleet in its capital mobilisation and renewability, but on average the fleet is 25 years old. It has to compete with fleets across Europe that are much more modern and have had reinvestment in the industry, which many sectors of our fishing fleet have not had for some considerable time. There is a safety issue which should be recognised. Older boats and younger skippers are going to ever deeper waters, and that raises major safety questions.

There is also an economic aspect. I hope that the Minister will at least say that, despite the self-imposed spending straitjacket, the whole question of structural funding, which could be opened up in the Community, and the possibility of a scrap-and-build approach, which has been used successfully in other European countries—something which the Minister mentioned often when he was in opposition—could form part of the strategy for the white fish fleet now that the structural aspect opens the door to reinvestment.

Mr. Morley: I understand exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. We have looked into the issue

of EU rules on structural funds for vessel improvements. Currently, the global MAGP target must be met before the member state is eligible for funds; so, although we have met our target in some segments, until we meet our global target we are not eligible.

Mr. Salmond: I understand that point. It bring me neatly on to the pressure on the pelagic sector. I can understand the encouragement that the Minister takes from the fact that he can lift the threat of a further-days-at-sea policy or other unpopular effort restrictions on the white fish fleet.

However, I have a tiny suspicion that the very small number of pelagic boats will be convenient whipping boys to carry the burden of capacity reduction. If my quick calculations are correct—and they may be wrong—and if I follow the Minister's logic, we are talking about capacity reductions of a third or more over the four years remaining in the MAGP target. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that point.

As has been pointed out, in the North sea, herring quotas are up by 60 per cent. and western mackerel quotas are up by 20 per cent. People who work in the pelagic sector will find it virtually impossible to understand the huge capacity reduction in their fleet if the quota assessment is moving in the opposite direction.

I return to this important point. Considering the nature of the pelagic fleet and of the herring and mackerel species, and the wide fluctuations in those species, is it at all sensible to use the blunt instrument of MAPG targets? Is a more sophisticated approach possible?

If the Minister can find the ingenuity almost to spirit away the target shortfall in relation to the white fish fleet, I am sure that, if he examines how other countries in Europe address the question, he will not find it beyond the bounds of possibility to avoid the severe disablement of our pelagic fleet and its capacity to compete with other pelagic fleets at the cutting edge of the European Union fishing market.

This is very much a Scottish matter. Eighty-five per cent. of pelagic capacity is in the tank ship Scottish fleet. I would not like to think that this Scottish matter was being placed in the firing line because it squares circles elsewhere. Although the number of its boats is limited, the pelagic fleet is hugely important for a growing onshore industry, as processing has replaced the capacity that used to be taken up by klondykers and other processors.

We have at last been building an impressive home pelagic processing industry. If it cannot be guaranteed the supplies—much of the industry uses dedicated supplies—not hundreds of boats and hundreds of jobs in the pelagic catching sector, but thousands of jobs in the pelagic processing sector, might be at risk. I will leave it there, except to say that the pelagic fleet seems to be in the firing line. I hope that a way can be found to avoid the blunt instrument of widespread capacity reductions. On the face of it, if quotas were properly implemented, the fleet's capacity could perhaps be well sustained.

One thing was slightly missing from the Minister's speech. I understand that this debate has to go through the detail of quota assessments, but—this is not too harsh a criticism of the Minister—I was looking for a bit more vision in relation to the direction of Community policy. The Minister and I agree that, in 1992, during the last United Kingdom presidency, a magnificent opportunity was lost to tackle some of the fundamental underlying issues in the fishing industry. I would hate to think that hopes and opportunities are going to be lost again.

It is not comforting that one of my European colleagues has told me that the United Kingdom representation documents for the presidency apparently contain no mention of fishing as a substantive issue. That does not give me confidence that the Minister has succeeded in persuading his colleagues of the critical nature of the industry and of the fact that, in the run-up to 2002, the presidency should be used to try to shape policy.

I should have liked to hear a bit more about progress on quota hopping. I have spoken to the Minister about the suggestions from the Mallaig and North-West Fishing Association on whether the Marine Safety Agency and safety aspects could be brought into play in relation to quota hoppers.

I should also like to have heard a lot more about coastal states management—the decentralisation of fisheries policy—which many of us believe offers great hope for a much more sensible ordering of our affairs in terms of European fisheries. Other European countries substantially support that approach. I should like to hear a bit more about the Minister's thoughts on the matter.

Figures on the relative weight of the Scottish fleet in the United Kingdom fishing industry show that the Scottish fleet accounts for 67 per cent. of UK landings, 57 per cent. of the UK industry's value, and 46 per cent. of UK vessels over 10 m, against 45 per cent. for England and Wales. By any measurement and definition, the Scottish industry constitutes the bulk of the UK fishing fleet. As a percentage of gross domestic product, it is 14 times more important to the Scottish economy than to the UK economy as a whole. Fishing is a dominating powerhouse industry in Scotland, and should be viewed as such.

Tomorrow, we expect the publication of the devolution Bill. Press leaks tell us that the role that was envisaged for the Scottish Parliament within a European context is to be played down, diminished, or even removed entirely from the Bill. I therefore hope that a Scottish colleague will whisper in the Minister's ear and give me some reassurance that, within the context of the European negotiations, the new Scottish Parliament will above all have a significant, continuing and entrenched role in fishing policy. Despite the individual ability of the Minister with responsibility for fisheries, it is vital for Scotland's fishing communities that they are represented by the Scottish Parliament, so that they are never again subjected to the disarray and humiliation which has been their lot over the past 18 years.

6.45 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): As one new Member to another, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on her maiden speech. We have both attended virtually every meeting in the House on the fishing industry, adding to our local knowledge by understanding some of the larger complexities. I look forward to attending many more meetings with her.

I congratulate the Government on the progress made so far, and I welcome the Minister's speech. I am pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to this important debate,

[Mrs. Joan Humble]

which is vital for my constituents in Fleetwood. It is especially vital that the Government negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen.

I should like to outline why the debate is important for my constituents. Fleetwood bounced back from the loss of its distant water grounds. During the mid to late 1980s, it had a fleet of about 60 inshore and home water trawlers, which made a significant contribution to the landings at the port and utilised many local services.

Unfortunately, in the early 1990s, vessels were sold or decommissioned, or the owners of the vessels went into receivership. Now, there are fewer than 30 trawlers and a further eight have been the subject of successful decommissioning bids in the current round. Of those, three have already been decommissioned. Further contraction of the indigenous fleet will threaten the entire sector at Fleetwood. We are at the "critical mass" level of activity. That is why it is vital for my constituents that the Government negotiate a fair deal for them and ensure that the industry continues.

The issue of the availability of quota to the local fish producers organisation is vital. Against a background of losses of quota in recent years, it is working hard to make the most of the available quota. It is essential, therefore, that the track record attaching to decommissioned vessels at the Fleetwood PO is not lost to the organisation. It is hoped that the recently introduced facility of effectively trading in track record will not further reduce the quota available to the PO. However, I am disturbed to find that that appears to be happening already.

Some 40 per cent. of our entitlement to Dover sole has been purchased by an entrepreneur, who is interested not in the boats, but in their licence entitlement. He has taken the fish away from Fleetwood, although he lives in my constituency. He has transferred management of the fish to a producer organisation that is noted for acting for Dutch quota hoppers. I have already raised my concerns about the impact of the loss of track record with the Minister, and I am sure that he will take them into account in any future decommissioning schemes.

All that makes the new year allocation of quota a major concern for my constituents. Fleetwood has a low quota allocation. I understand that further reductions in cod, whiting and saithe quotas are proposed for area VI, with some increase in the haddock quota, and that reductions are proposed in whiting and sole quotas for area VIIa, with a welcome increase in haddock and plaice quotas. While there are clearly some concerns about reductions in some of the allocations, my fishermen welcome increases elsewhere.

Without sufficient landings, we will not sustain the port's various businesses. I make no apologies for my special pleading for Fleetwood. Other hon. Members can argue for their areas, but I am arguing for the fishermen of Fleetwood and the industries connected with their landings.

I believe that there are reasons for allocating additional quota to a port such as Fleetwood to prevent the total collapse of the fishing sector. One means of achieving that is being developed by my local fish forum. It concerns the quota released by vessels being broken up under the decommissioning scheme. Instead of being sold on or reallocated to POs on a pro rata basis, which in some cases means only a few extra cases of fish to each port, it would become the subject of a socio-economic bid, just as cash resources are bid for under the single regeneration budget or city challenge.

I hope that the Minister will consider a variety of ways to ensure sustainable fisheries management and effective enforcement and that he will acknowledge the special place of communities such as Fleetwood.

I welcome the Minister's saying that he is considering the possibility of designated ports. The issue has not yet been raised in the debate. I know that some of the catchers in Fleetwood object to the proposals for designated ports; nevertheless, the Fleetwood fish forum and my local authority—Wyre borough council—fully support the idea, to protect the future of the port and to develop far more effective enforcement measures.

The system would also make a significant contribution to the emerging philosophy of the regional management of fisheries, with designated ports becoming regional hubs, and their port assets and shore-based businesses being utilised more effectively. Certainly, the fish dock at Fleetwood is a designated facility, used exclusively by fishing vessels. That is not the case in all ports. I look forward to hearing more details of the Government's proposals in the new year.

Finally, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look positively at a variety of options available to halt the decline in my local fishing industry, especially given the previous Government's appalling record. Let us hope that we arrive at a solution while ports such as Fleetwood still have a fishing industry to benefit from them.

6.51 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on a first-rate speech. It was first rate because it lasted six minutes, not 30. In my experience, when an hon. Member makes a short speech, people listen. I hope to follow the hon. Lady's example.

Reference has been made to the Hague preference, which is the reason why the Conservative Benches are so empty. The leader of the Conservative party is holding his pre-nuptial party, which explains why this side of the House is so deserted. Otherwise, it would be crammed with hon. Members wanting to speak about fish. I hope that it explains why I am going to make a very short speech, which is not customary, and why I shall not be here to hear the winding-up speeches. I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Minister understand that.

Brixham is in my constituency, which includes the coastline from Paignton to just outside Thurlestone. About 3,000 to 4,000 of my constituents are employed in the fishing industry. Brixham, which is the principal port, is the second largest fishing port in England and Wales. Fishing is a vocation, rather like being a Member of Parliament but a great deal more dangerous. I pay tribute to the courage of the fishermen. They have a tough way of life, especially in this sort of weather, but they still bring us fresh fish every day.

The United Kingdom fleet lands £637 million worth of fish each year. About £100 million of this is taken up by quota hoppers. We must get the facts straight. About 20 per cent. of the fish landed in Great Britain goes to another nation, or several nations, and is lost to

UK fishing communities. About £95 million worth of fish is landed in Devon and Cornwall every year, but a high percentage of that—about 40 per cent.—goes to Spanish or Dutch quota hoppers. The boats are crewed by other Europeans, and the profits go to foreigners.

The real question is whether a country's birthright should be a negotiable asset. Quota hopping breaks our historic and traditional right as a seafaring nation to harvest fish in our own waters. However, it is not only the British fishing industry which is under threat, because the French industry is also being threatened. If the Spanish continue to be allowed to buy the quota of other countries, we will end up with a European fleet made up exclusively of Spanish boats. That strikes me as a major problem. It was not solved by the previous Government, but it provides an opportunity for the Minister to win his spurs if he can deal with it.

The main issue for the Government is how we get back our quota. Can some countries continue to take the quota of other countries? Will a quota be a saleable commodity? I understand that this is not the case with the milk quota and that each country can use only its own quota. Why then can one country buy another country's fish quota?

Mr. Morley: It was a policy supported by the previous Government who were keen on the tradeability of quotas.

Mr. Steen: Well, we have to put it right now. Quotas should not be tradeable; if they are tradeable, the Government should buy ours back. The Government may argue that British fishermen sold their quota in the first place, so why should public money be used to buy it back? The simple answer is because our fish stocks are a vital national asset. In many areas of the country, fishing plays a crucial part in the local economy and provides much local employment. In addition, the quota should be inalienable. When we were in government, we recognised the complexities of the problem. Even if we got it wrong at the outset, we realised in the end that we had to get it right.

The former Prime Minister rightly said that he would not complete the Amsterdam treaty without solving the quota hopping mess, but the new Government seem to have been hoodwinked into thinking that they have solved the problem. They have not. In fact, the Europeans—I use a mixed metaphor—have sold us a pup. The deal negotiated at Amsterdam brings with it no material benefit to the UK fishing industry. Even if it did, President Santer says that it is not enforceable.

As I understand it, the Government have negotiated a deal whereby vessels must land at least 50 per cent. of their catch in their country of registration, or visit that country at least eight times a year for eight hours. If I am wrong, I should be pleased to be corrected.

Mr. Morley: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The visiting qualifications are the present qualifications for licences. Our proposals cover 50 per cent. of the catch, 50 per cent. of the crew or 50 per cent. of the trips starting from a UK port.

Mr. Steen: That is quite helpful, but let us analyse those three points. The first is that 50 per cent. of fishing trips emanate from British ports. That simply involves a vessel from a Spanish port steaming up the channel, arriving at Brixham, and starting its log from there. It then leaves Brixham, returns and goes back to Spain. That may not be practical, but it is possible.

The next option relates to 50 per cent. of the catch being landed at a UK port. This is the option that concerns the fishermen of Brixham. If 50 per cent. of the catch has to be landed at Brixham, the fish will be loaded onto a 44-tonne refrigerated lorry on the docks without even reaching the local auction house. The lorry will then head for Spain, and the catch will in no way have benefited the people of Devon. Only the oil companies will gain. Shell and BP shareholders might be fortunate and benefit from those lorries being filled with fuel, but the public will not benefit. There will also be problems with the ozone layer because of the wretched lorries pouring out diesel fumes on their way to Spain. In other words, no one in the UK port will benefit. There will be more bureaucracy but no extra fish.

Although I want to keep my remarks short, I should like to explore one other issue: flags of convenience that are owned by the Spanish. Does the Minister thinks that the 50 per cent. rule will bring any benefit to people in British ports? I cannot understand how it will create any extra employment. There will not be any extra money. All that will happen is that the fish will not swim, but will be driven, to Spain. I cannot readily understand how our fishermen will benefit from that. Ministers talk about energy conservation, yet they sign up to an agreement that will increase the number of diesel-guzzling lorries loaded with fish—pounding through the English countryside, over the channel and down to Spain.

Fishermen also feel let down about decommissioning. I gather that the Government allocated £53 million, over five years, to ease the problems of fleet reduction. Of that, £36.4 million has been spent and a further £14.3 million has been allocated—leaving a £2.3 million shortfall. Has that money gone to Guernsey or been lost somewhere? Perhaps the Minister can explain what has happened to it.

The Minister will have to spell out—I know that he has to do an awful lot of spelling out in his reply, because every hon. Member has asked him to say something—the benefits of his negotiations at Amsterdam to the ports and people of the south-west. I am not being difficult with him or making a political point, but I cannot discern a benefit.

Perhaps there has been a secret negotiation in which the Minister has done a deal with the other European countries. We do not know about the deal, which is why we are puzzled about it and why the benefit to fishermen and to our ports is not readily seen. Perhaps that is also why there have been so many speeches in the debate about quota hopping. Given his interest in the subject, perhaps he will explain the situation to the House. I will read his explanation in tomorrow's *Hansard*, because he will excuse me if I go off to the prenuptials. I am sure that all hon. Members would like to hear the explanation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I will soon have to call for the Front-Bench replies to the debate, and can therefore call only four more Back Benchers to speak. I can do that only if hon. Members take no more than eight minutes apiece to speak. I cannot rule on the matter and am in the hands of the House, but I give that advice.

7.1 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I will try to stick to your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Since May, I have noticed that one of the features of debates in the House is how often it has become absolutely clear that the new Government have received a terrible inheritance from the previous Government. There are few worse examples of that inheritance than the common fisheries policy, which was established many years ago with the aim of conserving fishing. This debate and debates on the policy in previous years have shown that that principal aim has not been achieved. Moreover, not only fishermen but the public feel that there is something wrong with a policy that requires dead fish to be thrown back into the sea.

The Conservative Government signed up to the common fisheries policy, and they were in power during its 10-year review. They also held the European Union presidency at the end of 1992, and failed to address the quota-hopping issue, although everyone had known since 1991 that it was a problem.

The Government have also inherited the legacy of the huge and unrealistic expectations raised among fishermen because of the anti-European froth spouted by the Conservatives in the months leading up to the general election. I believe that fishermen were used and exploited by the anti-European brigade—especially by the Maastricht rebels—for their own ends. The people of Lowestoft will remember the sight of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) clambering over trawlers in the port. They had not previously realised that she had such an interest in fishing—although I noticed that she sat through part of today's debate.

Everyone is now clear that those expectations would always be impossible to fulfil, unless we withdrew completely from the European Union. Even in this debate, however, I have heard hon. Members talking about "going to the line" and "pushing it to the limit". We saw what happened on beef. A policy of non-co-operation in Europe achieved only the creation of the acronym PONCE—which is also what the Europeans called Ministers who went to Europe on behalf of the previous Government, espousing their policy.

This Government have achieved more in a few months than the Tories achieved in years. The economic link established by the Government to deal with quota hopping is beginning to work. I mentioned earlier that there has already been an instance in Lowestoft in which a quota hopper has had to take on two British fishermen to fulfil requirements. It is true that those fishermen were recruited from a Lowestoft trawler company, but there are plenty of unemployed fishermen in Lowestoft to take their place. Surely that is the point of the economic link—to create jobs, livelihoods and prosperity for British fishermen.

Happily, since those PONCE days, things are settling down, and sensible discussions and meetings are taking place. In July, I attended a meeting in Lowestoft between East Anglian fishermen and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary. Fishermen said that they were impressed by him, because he was willing to listen and he showed commitment and understanding and had great knowledge of and expertise in the fishing industry. Their conclusion—which was published in the press—was that he was a man they could do business with.

Since the general election, the story for fishing in Lowestoft has been quite a good one, in relative terms. The fishermen of Lowestoft felt that there were more plaice out in the North sea than the scientists had calculated. Again in his listening mode, the Minister authorised the scientists to recheck the situation. Consequently, the plaice quota was increased from 80,000 tonnes to 91,000 tonnes. Although that figure has had to be reduced in the recent negotiations, the new plaice quota for next year is 87,000 tonnes, which is still well above the 80,000 figure that the scientists had originally proposed.

The huge variation in scientific observations is creating a problem. It is all very well to say at the beginning of the year that the quota should be set at a certain amount, and then to raise it part of the way through the year, but jobs will have been lost and livelihoods will have been wrecked in the meanwhile. I can therefore understand why fishermen call for greater consistency from scientists, and why they question some of their findings.

One matter on which I agree with the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) is that we have to get scientists and fishermen together on agreeing what stocks are out there. An agreement will not be easy, but we will have to make a serious attempt at reaching one. If we do so, politicians will no longer be in the middle. As a local politician, the Minister is in the middle. One hears both from one's scientists and from one's fishermen. One cannot say that either group is not telling the truth, but which group does one believe? It is a very difficult situation.

Lowestoft is concerned primarily with plaice, so the news for next year is good. However, one realises—with today's announcement on MAGP IV—that there are difficult times beyond that. Although our small boat fleet will not be affected under MAGP IV, there will have to be a significant reduction in the beam trawler effort. That reduction, although not the nightmare previously feared, will be very difficult.

There are only 11 beam trawlers left in Lowestoft, and everyone feels that we need those 11 trawlers to sustain the Lowestoft fish market. Without the fish market, we cannot really have a fishing industry in Lowestoft. Pardon the pun, but the guts of the industry are in that market. I therefore request that Lowestoft may have serious talks with the Minister to decide what can be done to ensure that, in implementing MAGP IV, the Lowestoft fish market will be sustained.

We are stuck with MAGP IV, which is a consequence of the common fisheries policy. It behoves us all, however, to look ahead in deciding how we can reform the policy. I support what hon. Members have said this evening about the need for more localised regional management. That must be the way forward. Another way is for the Government to sit down and talk to the industry sensibly, with no froth and fire, and to give fishermen a stake in their industry. We have used the term stakeholding in many other contexts; fishermen have an interest in conservation and it is important to give them that opportunity.

The new Government have begun to establish a better relationship with the fishing industry. It is important that we work together in a responsive and responsible way to tackle the problems that lie ahead if we are radically to reform the common fisheries policy.

7.10 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In view of the advice that you gave the House a moment or two ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall resist the temptation to argue with the contentious remarks made by the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) about my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and, presumably, about myself and my other hon. Friends.

What we achieved by showing a particular interest in the fishing industry was to put that industry firmly on the political agenda where it had not been before. Had the hon. Gentleman been in the House at the beginning of the previous Parliament, he would have seen that there was a relatively low attendance at fishing debates, but, by the end of the Parliament, many right hon. and hon. Members showed a tremendously increased interest in fishing. It is no exaggeration to say that it was the action of the so-called rebels which put the fishing industry on the political agenda.

I agree with the hon. Member for Waveney about conservation. So much is said to justify the common fisheries policy in terms of what it does to conserve fish stocks, but, as the Minister will know, I have serious concerns about the proposals to reduce the minimum landing size of fish. I know that the fishing industry shares those concerns because fishermen are responsible people who want to look after the long-term interests of their industry. I believe that the British public would share those concerns if those aspects of the common fisheries policy, to which I shall refer in a moment, were more widely known.

It is a complete mystery to me why, when there are so many animal welfare lobbies showing interest in wildlife and animals, no public attention has been drawn to the fact that we are wasting a huge amount of resources by discarding perfectly saleable fish dead into the sea. The proposals that we are considering contain measures to reduce the minimum landing size of fish. That means that, quite legally, fishermen will be catching fish that will not have had an opportunity to breed; that is absolutely appalling.

I know that the Minister is constrained by the fact that we have to get agreement in Europe to any change. The hon. Member for Waveney should recognise that. The Minister talked about clamping down on black fish. That will lead to greater tonnages of discard and will add to the total loss of fish. It seems extraordinary that the fishing industry culls the young stock whereas in the case of animals, stock that have come to their end of their useful life, are old and have lost value are culled.

The Minister will not be surprised when I say that I wish to pursue the arguments raised in the fisheries debates on 9 and 23 July for, as he has conceded, I am nothing if not consistent. He might also recognise another trait—that of persistence. I should like him to know that I intend to persist in my endeavours to establish the truth. Indeed, if successive Ministers had told the truth over the past 25 years, it is questionable whether we would be in our current position.

The reason why the truth about fisheries is a truth that dare not speak its name is that had the British people been told the truth, they would never have voted to remain in the EEC in 1975. Had they been told that, as from 1 January 2003, fishing vessels of all member states of the EU would be able to fish right up to our beaches—or technically speaking, the base line—that there would be no such thing as a British fishing fleet, and that all the fish in the seas around the British Isles would belong to the EU, there would have been uproar.

For 25 years, the House and the people of Britain—not least the fishermen—have been fed a diet of half-truths, deceptions and downright lies. Article 38 of the treaty of Rome spoke only of a common market in agriculture and fisheries products, but, almost by sleight of hand, subsequent treaties have ensured that fisheries are now part of the acquis communautaire.

Which Minister drew the attention of the House to the clause in the Maastricht treaty which joined fisheries to agriculture and which Minister flagged up the inclusion of the EU fisheries permit system in the treaties of accession for Austria, Finland and Sweden? If the basic fisheries regulation continues indefinitely, as Ministers claim, why did they feel it necessary to include a permit system as a treaty obligation, given that article 4—which sets out the permit system—is already part of the basic regulation?

It is now clear that there will be no reform of the CFP. I hope that the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) is paying attention. It was confirmed by Mr. John Farnell, director of Directorates-General XIV in his address to the Greenwich Forum on 16 October. In his reply to me in the House on 12 November, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office stated that the Government now accept that reform is out of the question. All that will happen on that front, as the Minister himself admitted on 23 July, is that

"the Commission has to produce a report by 31 December 2001"—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1997; Vol.298, c.906.]

It is committed not to a reform, but simply to a report. That is in accordance with article 14.2 of the basic regulation 3760/92/EEC which states:

"the Commission must produce a report on Community fisheries by the end of 2002, dealing in particular with the economic and social situation of coastal regions, the state of the fisheries resources and their expected development, and the implementation of the basic Regulation."

So there we have it—the implementation of the basic regulation.

That is not what the Labour party was saying prior to the general election. Its election manifesto said:

"We will seek a thorough overhaul of the Common Fisheries Policy to conserve our fish stocks in the long-term interests of the UK fishing industry".

Nor is it what Labour MEPs are saying. They have voted by an overwhelming majority to approve the Carmen Fraga Estevez report which states, among other things, that

"the decisions adopted by the Council throughout the 1970s on the creation of a common fisheries policy asserted the principle of freedom of access to Community fishing grounds."

Secondly, it states that

"in the absence of a decision by the Council, the principle of equal access will apply automatically as from 1 January 2003 . . . if a fresh derogation is considered necessary, it will have to comply with Article 235 of the Treaty which requires unanimity within the Council."

Thirdly, the report states quite correctly that

"exemptions from the general principle will be repealed automatically as from the year 2002, when the current fisheries policy expires unless otherwise decided (in which case unanimity is required within the Council)."

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

For the benefit of the hon. Members for St. Ives and for Waveney, those are the facts, the realities and the constraints within which our Ministers have to operate. More to the point, the Carmen Fraga Estevez reports continues:

"as we have repeatedly stressed throughout this introduction, the current common fisheries policy in fact constitutes a derogation from the principle of freedom of access, and this derogation will expire in 2002."

Will the Minister recognise that what I am saying, what the Commission is saying, what the Carmen Fraga Estevez report is saying, what his own Members of the European Parliament are saying and what Save Britain's Fish has been saying for a long time is the truth? Personally, quite apart from the fact that it seems improbable that all those people have reached the wrong conclusion, I have no argument with what they are saying. However, I take exception to the craven refusal of successive British Governments to tell the truth.

For example, the new Labour Government, although at last conceding that article 6 of regulation 3760/92 is a derogation, apparently refuse to accept that the regulation is itself a derogation. By dint of its being a derogation, it will not continue beyond 2002 without further agreement. Will the Minister tell the House whether he can produce any documentary evidence that regulation 3760/92 will continue beyond 2002? In the absence of such evidence, it is a matter of fact that the regulation, including article 6, will have to be renegotiated. The question then is what the British Government will give in exchange for Spain's acquiesence. I invite the Minister to assure the House that the bargaining counter will not be the rock of Gibraltar.

The Government deny that, post-2002, we shall have, in effect, a single European fishing fleet, catching European fish in European waters. They do not understand that, as a result of the Maastricht treaty and the treaties of accession, the principle of equal access without discrimination is enshrined in Community law. It is not negotiable. Prior to those treaties, one could have argued that the CFP was open to renegotiation because its basis was in regulation. Now that it is firmly established as part of the acquis, that option no longer exists.

Which of the fisheries Front-Bench spokesmen participating in this debate will be the first to look British fishermen in the eye and admit the mistakes of the past? Will it be the fisheries Minister himself or will it be my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack)? It may be of some assistance to them in determining their answer to bear in mind the old saying, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time". I accept that politicians do not like admitting mistakes and least of all having to apologise, but I assure the House that, on this issue, where a vital national interest is at stake, they will be hounded until they do.

7.21 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is wonderful to see so many Labour Members representing fishing ports and speaking up eloquently and articulately in defence of their local fishing industries—particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler), who made her maiden speech and raised another voice for the fishing industry. It is even more exciting after 18 years to see in this annual December debate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) as the Minister at the Dispatch Box. I congratulate him on having made himself such a master of the industry so quickly and on winning its respect and support in the way he has.

I do not want to say anything about total allowable catches because there is not much time. I want to make only two points. First, the cod quota, especially in the North sea, is up due to huge juvenile stocks. What proposals does the Minister have to conserve and protect those juvenile stocks so that they can grow into marketable fish? Secondly, will the Minister put off setting an allocation for horse mackerel? The record is incomplete and inadequate and it would be premature to do so.

On quotas, I shall make only two points. First, there is a great need to smooth out allocations, because scientific advice tends to work like a switch-back, a roller-coaster, amplifying trends. It is good at describing historical record but bad at predicting and dealing year by year on a single-species basis. We therefore need to smooth out fluctuations. I suggest adjustments of no more than 10 per cent. up or down. The economic viability of the industry and the impact on communities has to be taken into account as well as conservation. We need to take account of and do more to control discards. It is a simple fact of life that when quotas go down, discards go up, especially in mixed fishing, where there is an horrendous problem of discards. There are all sorts of ways of attempting to deal with such problems. The Canadians are making effective use of square-mesh panels, which gives them more selectivity in catching. We must approach the issue through mixed quotas. All such ways need to be considered because discards are becoming quite a serious problem.

Secondly, it is good to know that now that the multi-annual guidance programme IV has been in force for about a year we have some details of what it involves. It is good to know that there will be no reduction in the demersal fleet, although I must warn the Minister that reductions in the pelagic fleet and beam trawlers will be quite substantial and have a serious effect on the industry—too big to be handled on the basis of co-operative concession, particularly since many involved are not quota hoppers and will not give up just because the British Minister pleads with them to do so.

MAPG IV is not simple, clear and transparent. It is opaque because different countries use different methods to reach the target. It will be very difficult to compare and contrast who succeeds in reaching the targets, yet a good deal depends on it—allocations from Europe, for instance.

I thought that it was ominous when the Minister mentioned the strict financial review that is taking place. Decommissioning money will be necessary; there is no doubt about it. If we are to reduce effort, there is no other effective way of doing so. We cannot go back to the days-at-sea approach. Many of us, especially my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, have held too many verbal hostages to fortune over days-at-sea limitations. The only alternative, therefore, is money. That means money to modernise the fleet. Our fleet is very old in comparison with others, which have had European money to

modernise. The average age of our fishing vessels is 25 years, in total contrast with fishing industries in other countries.

I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on the need to maintain industry in ports such as theirs and mine at a critical mass which will sustain facilities and prevent the industry imploding. Most of the decommissioning in the previous round—in fact, 80 per cent. of it—was of English vessels. That is reducing our fleet to such a level that there has to be some means of allowing the producer organisation to purchase quota and track record in order to keep the industry local. Highlands and islands finance in Scotland has been a key element in allowing the purchase of quotas, so why cannot the regional development agencies that we are setting up allocate money through the producer organisation to keep the industry viable locally? There must be some financial basis for allocations.

I express only disappointment at the proposals on quota hoppers. While it is important to do something, what is proposed will be an annoyance to sections of the English industry without closing the door, penalising or controlling quota hoppers.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has worked hard to give the industry a stable prospect and a base for expansion and development, and I congratulate him on that. He has taken that purpose very seriously. However, we also committed ourselves in the manifesto to a fundamental review of the common fisheries policy. The presidency offers great opportunities. I hope that my hon. Friend will not merely use it to be an impartial defender of other people's interests or to concentrate on environmental matters, which are so close to his heart. It is right to deal with drift nets, and so on—I am absolutely 100 per cent. with him on that—but to concentrate on environmental matters and ignore the national interest would be dangerous.

I agree with the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) that there can be no prospect of a fishing industry for this country inside the CFP. I want to pull out, but there is an intermediate, transitional stage. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister should work to move the CFP away from equal access to one of a common resource, under greater national control and influence, allowing Europe—perhaps—to set measures of the lowest common denominator but giving coastal states more control over their own catches and waters, with a more focused control rather than the broad, sweeping, simple, lowest common denominator measures that Europe goes in for.

The common fisheries policy is the worst fishing policy in the world because it is not effectively enforced, it pits fishermen against each other in a competition to decimate stocks, and there is no incentive to conserve stocks. Any fisherman who adopts practical conservation measures immediately sees the fish looted and pillaged by fishermen from other countries. Fishermen are also not stakeholders in the policy, which is the only way that we shall see effective conservation in the industry.

It was nice of my hon. Friend the Minister to make jokes about policy no longer being dictated by Euro-sceptic rumps. I did not take it personally, even though I offer more Euro-scepticism and more rump than most of the Tories do. However, the Minister's comment is not an effective debating point. The fishing industry has been weakened because it has been sacrificed so often and for so long to Euro-enthusiasm.

To obtain concessions in other areas, we have made concessions on fishing because it is not a politically important or powerful industry. That must stop. I have every confidence that my hon. Friend will work to stop it, because he takes the interests of the industry seriously. We must assert the national interest because our interest is in conserving our stocks and ensuring that we have a viable industry to hand on to future generations.

7.30 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): My constituency contains the historic ports of Hastings and Rye, where the fishing industry in recent years has experienced, in common with those elsewhere, a decline in its fortunes. Perhaps worse still, it has felt that the Government have not been listening. It is probably true to say that my very presence in the House is connected with the wrath felt by the fishing community towards the previous Government. It may also be connected with the visit by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) to my constituency during the election campaign. The leader of the Liberal Democrats also visited, but my hon. Friend must have had more effect.

Because of the limits on time, I shall immediately raise the single issue that most affects my constituents. The resolution refers to

"the need to ensure that the regional differences of fisheries and their communities are fully recognised."

I wish to relate that point to area VII, which covers my constituency. My constituents fish from vessels under 10 m and are limited to the locality of their port. With those smaller vessels, the quota for the area is allocated to the area and not to the boats. Therefore, the fish that the boats may take is dependent on the total number of similar small craft fishing in the area.

Two issues have arisen in the past few years that have caused my constituents some dismay and concern. First, fishermen from other areas around the United Kingdom are taking advantage of decommissioning grants, destroying their larger boats, purchasing 10 m licences—pocketing the difference on the way—and re-entering the industry, often in area VII, to take a share of that area's limited resources. Secondly, others have sold their licences for larger vessels and physically shortened their boats to less than 10 m. They are also coming to area VII and depleting still further the fish available to my constituents, who have historically fished there. I am told that at least eight boats from those two categories have entered the area in the past few months.

Within the past three years, the number of vessels sharing the spoils in area VII has virtually doubled. I am delighted that the overall quota remains the same for the coming year, but, with double the number of vessels, simple arithmetic shows that the catch for each vessel is effectively halved. In short, we have our own home-grown quota hopping, which is unfair and which, if allowed to go unchallenged, will risk the stability of the industry and communities such as those of the ports of Hastings and Rye.

There is a simple solution to the problem. If craft under 10 m were licensed to a particular area—to area VII in the case of Hastings and Rye fishermen—the number of

[Mr. Michael Jabez Foster]

area licences could be limited to those boats currently fishing in the area. If UK licences were exchanged for area licences, their numbers could be limited.

Historically, small ports such as Hastings and Rye have rationed their catch to ensure their long-term employment. This year, regrettably, the quota was exhausted this week because of the practices that I have mentioned. If yet more vessels move into the area, next year's Christmas break for my constituents will come even earlier and will be a holiday without pay.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, who has done so much in his short time in office to benefit the constituents to whom I have referred, to visit my fishing constituents. They would make him very welcome and thank him for what he has done, but they would also be able to describe their concerns much more graphically.

7.35 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), to the Dispatch Box. I hope that he will not think that I am presumptuous if I say that he is there not before time. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on her maiden speech. I understand that she is a sculptor in her spare time and she used her artistic powers verbally to paint a vivid picture of her constituency. I look forward to further speeches from her.

I also wish to congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend), for Totnes (Mr. Steen) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who showed their usual expertise in this debate. I understand that they have a different Hague preference from some of us in the Chamber tonight and are not able to be present.

The Minister began with the now customary new Labour language about the new era that has been ushered in. He told us that the unrealistic expectations and policies of the Conservatives, designed for the Euro-sceptics, had been replaced by the lush landscape of harmonious relationships with the European Union. I paraphrase, but I wish him well when he goes to the Council because he will learn from experience.

I wish to put the record straight on what the previous Government proposed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made it clear that we intended to achieve a resolution to quota hopping or the Amsterdam process would not have been concluded. The Minister may be right to say that we were outnumbered 14 to one and that we might not have made much progress, but we had been in that situation before. We will never now know whether we would have achieved a settlement on that basis, because the present Government bottled out—or adopted different tactics, depending on which side of the Chamber we sit.

Where have we got as a result of the Government's new communautaire approach? The beef ban is still unaltered, because it is simply a protectionist trade measure; the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is outnumbered 14 to one and unable to manoeuvre; and the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have had to eat humble pie over Euro X. The Government are learning from bitter experience what most previous Governments have learnt in the various European Council meetings.

The Minister gave us one or two answers on money issues, which followed the usual pattern that we have come to expect from Ministers recently. They say that they have a comprehensive spending review in train but that they have to follow the limits set by their predecessors. They say not a word about the £6 billion more in the Government coffers than the Red Book anticipated. The Government have far more manoeuvrability on spending than they tell their Back Benchers. However, the Minister added a few worrying comments. On the comprehensive spending review, he said that he would examine ways in which the industry could help to pay for any future decommissioning. That is worrying. He also mentioned the two-year implementation of the Conservative spending limits, but MAGP IV runs beyond the end of that two years. What are we to expect? Have we been promised anything or have we simply to hope for the best?

We need full industry involvement in the MAGP IV discussions. Sadly, the Scottish fishermen had to wait three months for a meeting to discuss it with a Minister. I agree with them that no conclusive view on the implementation of MAGP IV should be adopted, through any form of effort limitation scheme, unless there is full consultation with the industry.

We welcome the increase in the TAC for cod and haddock to 140,000 tonnes. A banking element is included, and the agreement of the industry is testament to the seriousness of the desire for conservation to succeed. However, the question of linked fishing remains. Notwithstanding the Minister's intervention earlier, I do not believe that there is any logic in increasing the cod TAC but not the haddock TAC. There has been a failure to achieve a TAC in the UK quota that reflects the abundance of fish present in the sea. Scientists have always told us that haddock and cod should be taken in common to protect cod, and I see no justification for breaking that link now. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) pointed out—following an intervention of mine—cod is still designated outside the safe biological limits, but haddock is inside. This shows a lack of concern in negotiations for a particular Scottish interest.

There seems to be a lack of will in making decisions, and I wish to refer in this regard to scientific advice. Ministers must decide and not just react. Scientists are advisers, not gods. They are not infallible. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) pointed out, it would make a great deal of sense—as the hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) agreed—to set up a joint council of fishermen and scientists; a standing committee to give information on fish stocks. There is a need to come to common agreement with common information, as this would help the Government and the industry. I hope that the Government will take the suggestion seriously, in the constructive spirit in which it is meant.

At present, we are dealing with MAGP IV and the figures suggest that there will be massive reductions, when we are told that the opposite is taking place. We must work on better scientific information than we have at present, and there is room for consensus on this.

I wish to refer briefly to whiting. I am pleased that the Government will discuss the industrial by-catch figure, hopefully for whiting and haddock. The 20 per cent. cut in the TAC for whiting is confusing, as whiting is also

inside the safe biological limits. Why is that reduction being made? The UK has an entitlement, under the Hague preference agreement, to 29,000 tonnes of North sea whiting. This must be negotiated in the Council. It is what we are due; it is not charity. The court will shortly make it clear that it is legal and proper. We know that, the industry knows that and our European partners and competitors know that. The Government have a duty to fight for what is due to the United Kingdom. That is particularly important in the west of Scotland.

There are concerns about the scientific advice, and the 40 per cent. reduction in the TAC for whiting cannot be absorbed in one go. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. He must know that the TAC for next year will be 11 tonnes over the previous calculation, and this must be the Government's minimum objective. I expect an explicit commitment from the Minister who replies to the debate. Moreover, the current UK quota is exclusive of the Hague preference, and this again must be negotiated in at the Council. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde mentioned saithe in the west of Scotland. Some 1,500 tonnes have been guaranteed for the UK by the Hague preference in 1997. This also must be retained. I am pleased—along with the industry and other hon. Members—in terms of pelagic fisheries, the stock recovery and the increased TAC. Perhaps the Minister can tell us why Norway has achieved a permanent share of 29 per cent., when those in the know in the industry expected and suggested a lower Norwegian share. There is also a special concern that the TAC on horse mackerel should be allocated among member states in 1998. As the Minister well knows—he is familiar with the issue—the concern centres on the doubts about correct species identification.

One of the other issues raised in the debate was the working time directive, from which sea fishing is exempt. However, this is a clear case of creeping competence by the EU. The fact that it was brought in, disgracefully, under health and safety—which we opposed—as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) said, does not reduce the validity of the argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde. The social chapter will simply be more of the same, but in other areas.

Share fishermen are regarded in the United Kingdom as self employed. The Government must protect them from the directive. We cannot have continuing interference from Europe in areas in which it has no business. During previous negotiations, we believed, in good faith, that these fishermen would remain exempt. It is no use these measures being introduced by the back door.

I turn now to quota hopping. The Minister referred to continuing discussions, which confused one or two of us who thought that we had a deal. The Prime Minister said on 18 June:

"We also made real progress in Amsterdam . . . We secured an agreement . . . we are entitled to put into law a clear economic link between boats using our quotas and Britain. Economic benefits from boats flying the British flag should go to British ports, for example through a proviso that 50 per cent. of a boat's catch should be landed locally. We will, with all possible speed, introduce new licence conditions to reflect that . . . those agreements will mean a major disincentive to quota hoppers, present and future. Commission agreement to the new measures means that their vulnerability to legal challenge—a perennial problem hitherto—should be greatly reduced."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 315.]

The deal is no more than an exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and Jacques Santer. It says that 50 per cent. of fish caught in the United Kingdom quota will have to be landed at British ports, and that fishermen landing their catch abroad will not be able to escape the controls that British fishermen are subject to. It is barely more than a clarification of the current procedure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said in the same debate that

"the Spanish have already poured scorn on his claims to have solved quota hopping."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 318.]

The truth, as the Government know, is that if they try to restrict the movements of existing quota hoppers, they will easily be defeated in the European Court. Therefore, Labour's deal, whereby quota hoppers will be made to land part of their catch in the United Kingdom, may be successfully challenged by the Spanish or Dutch fishermen currently fishing the UK quota. In any event, it does nothing to prevent the future purchase of British quota by overseas fishermen. It does not remove quota hoppers from the UK register; nor will it do anything to change the situation whereby part of the British quota is being caught by, and for the benefit of, overseas fishermen.

Finally, I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan about the Government's plans to be published tomorrow—but leaked yesterday—for devolution. At the moment, Scottish Office Ministers can lead for the United Kingdom at the Council. The former hon. Member for Aberdeen, South, Raymond Robertson, did so during the general election campaign. I understand that the Bill will say nothing about that, because it will not be acceptable to many Government Back Benchers—as it will not be acceptable to the Opposition—to have a Minister leading for the United Kingdom who is not answerable to the House of Commons. As a result of the proposals, an industry that is vital to Scotland will lose a powerful voice, and tomorrow we will ask the pertinent questions.

We wait with bated breath—if I may use that pun—for the three priorities of the presidency and the place that fishing will have among them. Government is not about mood music, it is about results. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are learning that charm is a limited currency in Europe. We do not blame them for trying to be charming—others have tried—but they must fight their corner.

The simple truth is that we in the House of Commons can huff and puff, consider and debate and make party points all we like, but control over fishing no longer rests here. The meaningful debate must begin from this point. The Government claimed that they wanted a full-scale overhaul of the common fisheries policy. Well, we are waiting.

7.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Calum Macdonald): It is a pleasure for me to wind up the debate, which has ranged widely and—for the most part—constructively across many aspects of fisheries policy. This is my first opportunity as a Scottish Office Minister to speak on this subject—or, indeed, any other—and I am grateful for the kind words of welcome from various hon. Members.

Mine is not the only maiden. We had the pleasure of an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler), who painted a lovely and enticing picture of her constituency and expressed

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

particular support for a greater regional approach to fisheries policy. This point was made also by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster), and the Government agree strongly—as is expressed in the motion tonight.

Like others, I acknowledge the special nature of the industry, which I know well from my constituency. Fishing is a harsh and dangerous occupation, and fishermen have regrettably paid the price for reaping the harvest of the sea. Our thoughts go to those who have lost relatives and loved ones in the fishing industry. The sinking of the Sapphire has been referred to, and I pay a personal tribute to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) for his campaign and, more especially, to the Sapphire families for the dignified way in which they have conducted their campaign.

The question of safety naturally came up in the debate. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) and the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) spoke about the five-year strategy for coastguard stations that was announced on 17 November. The aim is to enhance search and rescue around the United Kingdom and to improve the safety of seafarers, and a multi-million pound investment is being made in digital technology.

Staff, trade unions and others are being consulted on the proposed closures. A paper explaining the strategy and its detailed implications will be made available and comments invited, especially from fishermen's organisations. The Minister responsible, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), will publish that document, and she has been with us for this debate.

As hon. Members can see from the pile of papers in front of me, many issues have been raised in the debate. I shall try to get through as many as I can. If I fail to deal with some I shall write to those hon. Members who made them with specific answers. The first point came from the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who is no longer here. He queried the delay in the publication of the various figures and statistics lying behind tonight's debate. We now understand that the European Commission is to publish the full figures for the multi-annual guidance programme IV decisions today. I shall ensure that they are brought to the attention of the House as quickly as possible.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) mentioned the working time directive. As the former said, fishing is excluded from its terms; but the European Commission is considering the extension to fishermen of the directive's provisions for four weeks' paid annual leave; for health assessments for night workers; and for a guarantee of adequate rest and a maximum number of hours to be worked annually. We are aware of the industry's strong opposition to the application to sea fishing of working time requirements, and we shall seek to ensure that any arrangements introduced take full account of the realities of commercial fishing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) raised a couple of points, one of which concerned the Russian imports coming in through Aberdeen and the various hygiene requirements, which are causing difficulties. The Government are well aware of those concerns, and Ministers have met representatives of the processing industry to try to find a satisfactory solution. The Scottish Fish Merchants Federation has also made its concerns on the urban waste water directive clear to my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, but we are unfortunately unable to offer any prospect of relief from the costs.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) raised a matter that I remember from a Committee on which we both served not so long ago: the problem of an oil spill that affected the fishing interests in her constituency. She said that it did not appear to be from the source from which it was originally believed to have come. She made a serious point, and I shall make inquiries on the matter. Trying to ensure that the polluter pays is a United Kingdom problem, not just a Scottish problem.

On total allowable catches and quotas, several hon. Members have spoken of the need to secure increases in this or that TAC. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will have listened to those points and they will be taken into account in the forthcoming discussions. The hon. Member for St. Ives mentioned the inshore sector, and the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) made a similar plea. We are very mindful indeed of the regional differences in the industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) made an excellent speech defending the interests of her port, and the Government are very conscious of the problem to which she drew our attention. Our proposals on designated ports will be made with her concerns very much in mind.

The right hon. Member for Fylde mentioned the allocation of Atlanto-Scandian herring TAC, and described it as a very poor deal. I fully agree: it happens to be a deal which the previous Government negotiated, and unfortunately it is difficult to secure change to that allocation, but if we see an opportunity to do so we will take it.

Several hon. Members spoke about the allocation of new TACs, and horse mackerel was mentioned a few times. We acknowledge that there are problems with the definition of species and we want to ensure that if any proposals are made on allocations they are fair and take account of UK interests.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, along with the right hon. Member for Fylde and others, asked about the Hague preference, and the hon. Member for South Down made the point that its invocation in the Irish sea by the Republic works to the detriment of fishermen in Northern Ireland, whereas its invocation in the west of Scotland and the North sea can bring considerable benefits to the UK when TACs are restricted.

We will invoke the Hague preference whenever it is in our interest to do so. We recognise that fishermen from Northern Ireland often lose out because of the Irish invocation, and the Government will seek to minimise the losses by counter-invoking and by swapping in additional quotas from other member states. The hon. Member for South Down also referred to bilateral communication and discussions between the UK Government and Ireland; those are happening at a senior level through the Northern Ireland Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) expressed concern about the impact of effort control on the beam trawl segment, and other hon. Members made the same point about the pelagic segment. I want to make the point as strongly as I can that we are talking about effort control, not about cutting capacity permanently. We want to sit down with the industry and try to work out a system of effort control. We hope that those in the industry will work with us and with each other to avoid a compulsory approach and develop one that is co-operative and has the flexibility that many hon. Members said that they wanted.

On ring-fencing the pelagic segment, it is important to make the point that the changes to the licensing system will be quite complex, and that some aspects will take effect from today, to prevent action by vessel owners who might try to undermine the effect of the ring fence. We will not allow that.

Opposition Members spoke about decommissioning and expressed surprised that we were not making commitments beyond a comprehensive spending review. None of them mentioned the fact that we have managed to provide an additional £2.6 million for decommissioning since May. That money has gone a long way towards achieving our targets under MAGP III. The scale of financing any future decommissioning, and the ways in which it will be funded, will be decided following the outcome of the comprehensive spending review on fisheries that is currently under way.

Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), mentioned discards. At the October Fisheries Council, we were able to secure a new regulation that will both change the rules on fishing gear construction and give fishermen greater flexibility in meeting catch composition rules. That will come fully into force in two years' time. We are pressing the question of square mesh panels, which my hon. Friend raised, as part of the conservation measures that we are pursuing.

I shall respond by letter to some of the other points that have been raised. In conclusion, we are taking serious steps to tackle the fundamental problems that beset the fishing industry. These steps have been set out by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. On that basis, I commend the motion to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 153, Noes 378.

Division No. 121] **[7.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. John Whittingdale.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry

Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan

Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 360, Noes 150.

Division No. 122] **[8.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John

McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Woodward, Shaun	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Yeo, Tim	**Mr. John M. Taylor and**
Young, Rt Hon Sir George	**Mr. John Whittingdale.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th December 1997 relating to the fixing of total allowable catches for 1998 and certain conditions under which they may be fished; and supports the Government's intentions to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen based on sustainable fisheries management, effective enforcement and the need to ensure that the regional differences of fisheries and their communities are fully recognised.

European Communities (Amendment) Bill (Allocation of Time)

8.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill:—

Committee of the whole House

1.—(1) The remaining proceedings in Committee shall be completed in two allotted days.

(2) At the sitting on the first allotted day, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected and

(b) which would insert after '9' at line 13 of page 1 of the Bill words relating to paragraph 40 of Article 2 of the Treaty,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Seven o'clock.

(3) At the sitting on that day proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would insert at the end of line 13 of page 1 of the Bill words relating to Article 2(3)(b) of the Treaty,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Nine o'clock.

(4) At the sitting on the second allotted day, any remaining proceedings on Clauses 1 and 2 shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Six o'clock.

(5) At that sitting, the remaining proceedings in Committee shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Eight o'clock.

Proceedings on going into Committee

2. When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith whether or not notice of an instruction to the Committee has been given; and Standing Order No. 66 (Committee of the whole House on bill) shall not apply.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

3. On the conclusion of the proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and, if he reports the Bill with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

Report and Third Reading

4. The proceedings on Consideration and on Third Reading shall be completed on the second allotted day and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Conclusion of proceedings

5.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraphs 1 or 4, the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion before that time; and

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion,

and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion; and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted Business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Order of proceedings

6. No motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Interruption of business

8. The following business shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour—

(a) proceedings under paragraph 5(1);

(b) proceedings to which paragraph 5(2) or (3) applies;

(c) proceedings under paragraph 10(1).

Business Committee

9. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Supplemental orders

10.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) If at the sitting on an allotted day the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraphs 1 or 4, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Recommittal

11. No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise) and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

12. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day;

"the Treaty" means the Treaty signed at Amsterdam on 2nd October 1997 amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts.

The Bill that we are debating again tonight passed its Second Reading five weeks ago and on that night it obtained a majority in the House of 230; 50 more than the Government majority.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): So what?

Mr. Cook: That information is relevant precisely because, in the Division, the Bill received cross-party support from four parties represented in the Chamber. It is not simply a partisan measure supported by the Government alone; it represents a widely held view in the House. Among the mainland parties, only the Conservative party voted against it. Even one or two among that party managed to smuggle out messages that they did so half-heartedly.

Since the Second Reading debate, the Bill has received detailed consideration over three days. It has now been debated on the Floor of the House for 20 hours.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh!

Mr. Cook: I do not know quite what the hon. Gentleman finds so funny about that idea. I am bound to say that if he had sat through all of those 20 hours he would not have found them quite so funny.

Mr. Shepherd *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I shall proceed. The hon. Gentleman can intervene later.

That consideration is on top of the evidence on the Bill that I gave to the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), gave to the Scrutiny Committee. No fair-minded person can complain that Parliament has not had an adequate opportunity to scrutinise the Bill.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow) *rose—*

Mr. Shepherd *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I did say fair minded. I owe it to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) to give way.

Mr. Shepherd: The right hon. Gentleman is making out a case out about the details of the Bill and he is about to argue that it requires a guillotine. He will remember that the instance cited by the Leader of the House about the Single European Act was one which the right hon. Gentleman thought outrageous at the time, as did the right hon. Lady. They both voted against it. This is a constitutional Bill of

the first importance. The right hon. Gentleman appreciates that, yet he is so casual about imposing a guillotine of this nature on such an important Bill.

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is in order for the Leader of the House, who represents the entire House, to provide a cue for the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Such things are not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that if I ever require a prompt I shall be delighted to take it from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, but I have quite a lot of material here that I wish to share with the House.

May I say briefly to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills that I do at least salute the fact that he objected last Thursday when the Bill was proposed. He was the only Opposition Member who complained and I have to report to the House that, since the announcement last Thursday, we have not had one representation from the official Opposition.

Mr. Shepherd: That is not surprising.

Mr. Cook: I understand exactly what the hon. Gentleman means.

The motion is before the House because the House in Committee has dealt with only one third of the selected groups of amendments and is currently stuck on the fourth set of amendments. During our proceedings, hours of debate have been spent on monetary union, although the treaty of Amsterdam does not contain one new provision on monetary union.

I will not deny that some of those debates make entertaining reading, as much of the time has been taken up by one faction of the Conservative party arguing with another.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Nonsense.

Mr. Cook: I have it all here. There were times when Tory Members appeared more enthusiastic about scrutinising each other's views than about scrutinising the legislation before the House. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. and learned Gentleman disagrees, let me remind him that on the second day in Committee the former Chancellor disagreed with the shadow Foreign Secretary, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) disagreed with his hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior), the hon. Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) disagreed with his hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) disagreed with his hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Wycombe.

In fairness, I recognise that the shadow Foreign Secretary has done his bit to shorten our proceedings by preventing votes that would have revealed the divisions on his Back Benches. On Second Reading and in Committee, the right hon. and learned Gentleman rehearsed his fantasy fears that all 14 other member states would enter into a conspiracy to use the new article on fundamental human rights as a pretext to rob Britain of its voting powers. Despite hours of debate in Committee, the amendment tabled by him on that point was not pressed to a Division. I read in *The Daily Telegraph* that the amendment was not voted upon because the hon. Member for Wycombe visited the shadow Chief Whip and told him that many Tory Members could not vote for it.

It is, I admit it to my hon. Friends, tempting to allow the proceedings on the Bill to continue to run, so that we can continue to savour the spectacle of an Opposition whose members cannot abide each other's views on Europe, but we have a higher duty—to protect the legislative programme that fulfils the mandate on which the Government were overwhelmingly elected and to ensure that the business of the House proceeds in an orderly fashion.

We therefore present to the House a timetable motion that provides for an orderly and reasonable completion of the proceedings on the Bill with a further full two days of debate. In total, that will mean that the Bill will have been examined on the Floor of the House over six days of debate, which, by any fair test, is a reasonable opportunity for the House to scrutinise it fully.

Mr. Swayne: The Bill may have been examined over six days, but for how much time in any day was it scrutinised? On the days when we have examined it so far, there just happen to have been all sorts of Government statements, which has meant that we have not begun consideration of the Bill until later—not until 6 pm on one occasion.

Mr. Cook: I concede that we are a Government who are active and have a lot of business to announce to the House. Indeed, we are frequently twigged by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench on the ground that we do not announce enough to the House. If it would assist the hon. Gentleman, I could tell him that in future we will try to ensure that such announcements fall on an Opposition day rather than on one of the Government's legislation days.

I do not expect any display of gratitude from the shadow Foreign Secretary for curtailing the opportunity for the Conservatives to air their divisions. On the contrary, I look forward with keen anticipation to a display of virtuous indignation on behalf of the rights of Members of Parliament.

There are a couple of reasons why such a display of mock indignation will be especially misplaced in the context of the Bill. The first is that most of the policies in the Bill are policies that even Conservative Members support, notably the legal basis for Britain's external border controls. Indeed, the shadow Foreign Secretary keeps telling us that that is a provision that he himself negotiated. I am bound to say that no such provision was in any text of the draft treaty when we took over, but as he persists in believing his own rhetoric it is all the more odd that he should wish to talk out a provision for which at the same time he claims the credit.

Conversely, the one thing that most Conservatives can agree to oppose in the Bill is that it gives effect to Labour's commitment to take Britain into the social

[Mr. Cook]

chapter. It would be hard, even for the right hon. and learned Gentleman, to argue that that is a policy which we tried to keep hidden. On the contrary, we have campaigned vigorously for that objective since the Conservatives first invented the opt-out six years ago.

There cannot have been an elector who voted Labour in May who was unaware that the consequence of his or her vote would be to extend the benefits of the social chapter to Britain, and in that full knowledge the nation voted in gratifyingly large numbers for a Government to carry out the policy. It is a perverse distortion of reality to claim that a timetable motion to protect our commitment to the people is an affront to democracy. On the contrary, it is Opposition Members who have sought to frustrate the democratic vote of the nation by delaying the Committee proceedings.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Foreign Secretary must know that he went to the country wanting to extend qualified majority voting in four particular areas of policy, but succeeded in delivering only one of them. Never mind that he succeeded in conceding qualified majority voting in 13 other areas, of which the electorate were totally unaware. We are debating precisely that fact in Committee as the right hon. Gentleman introduces the timetable motion.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on complaining that I failed in my objective of extending qualified majority voting. That is a new line of attack for the Conservative Opposition. I must point out to him that the extension of qualified majority voting at Amsterdam was half the extension brought about by the Maastricht treaty, and was almost infinitesimal compared with the major extension that took place when the Conservatives entered the single market in 1986. In the light of that record, we shall take no lectures from Conservative Members about protecting the British veto.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must make some progress. I shall give way to him later.

I also remind the House that during the Conservative years they presented guillotine motions to the House 82 times—one for every two Tory Members who survived the deluge of the last election. In a previous debate, the shadow Foreign Secretary described Robespierre as a great reforming socialist. I am not sure whether I would go all the way with that characterisation, but I would certainly agree that Robespierre's affection for the guillotine was entirely shared by the Conservatives while they were in government.

Only last year, the present shadow Foreign Secretary presented to the House a guillotine motion that provided not for two days in Committee but for two hours in Committee. At least three times in the previous Parliament, the Conservative Government presented a guillotine motion not after three days in Committee but before the Second Reading had even begun.

I must remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that he himself voted for the guillotine motion on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill in 1986. The guillotine motion that he voted for on that occasion was less generous than the one that he will vote against tonight. It, too, followed three days of proceedings in Committee, but it provided for only a further five hours of debate. That Bill set up the single market and made far more sweeping changes to our relations with Europe than anything in the Amsterdam treaty.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question that was put by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)? Why does the Foreign Secretary wax so eloquent on the subject of the single market when he was against the guillotine motion on that Bill?

Mr. Shepherd: So was the Prime Minister.

Mr. Cash: So was the Prime Minister—and the Leader of the House. How can the Foreign Secretary get away with such hypocrisy, given that he thinks it is wrong for us to continue the debate and is imposing a guillotine on this Bill?

Mr. Cook: I can explain that with the greatest of pleasure. First, this is a much more generous timetable motion than the motion we were offered then. Secondly, that Bill was of greater constitutional magnitude because it provided for the most significant extension of qualified majority voting in the history of the European Union.

Mr. Cash: Absolute rubbish.

Mr. Cook: What I said is true. That Bill provided for a wide extension of Community competence through 11 new titles for Community action, which is far more than the Amsterdam treaty provides. It paved the way for most of the European Union regulations that Conservative Members now complain about most loudly.

Mr. Gill: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I shall not give way again.

Let us have no humbug about constitutional outrages from the very people who guillotined the earlier Bill. This Bill contains no similar measure of fundamental constitutional change. Indeed, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) described it in Committee as "a mouse", although no doubt that will not prevent him from puffing in mock indignation as he marches through the Division Lobby to oppose his mouse being guillotined.

I do not deny that the Bill is important. It is important because of the real benefits for the people of Britain that the Amsterdam treaty provides. The treaty gives, for the first time, explicit legal authority for Britain to retain its border controls; it confirms NATO as the cornerstone of our defence; it provides a fuller, legally binding basis for the principle of subsidiarity; it provides for tougher action on fraud against the Community budget; it obliges the European Union to give greater priority to protecting the environment, promoting openness in its proceedings and to tackling unemployment; and it extends to the working people in Britain the same rights under the social chapter as are enjoyed throughout the continent, but which were denied to them by the Conservatives.

The Bill fulfils the manifesto commitments on which we were elected by the British people. I commend the timetable motion to the House, so that the Government are not frustrated in their duty to carry out that electoral commitment. A vote for the motion will enable us to give effect to the clearly expressed wishes of the majority of Members of Parliament at Second Reading and to the even clearer choice of the people of Britain at the general election.

8.41 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The Foreign Secretary's performance showed the complete contempt in which he and the Government hold the House. He advanced two utterly novel propositions in justification of the guillotine. Their novelty was equal to their absurdity.

The first novel proposition advanced by the Foreign Secretary in support of the guillotine motion was that a large majority for a Bill on Second Reading relieves the House of its duty to scrutinise that legislation. What an extraordinary proposition. The second proposition that he advanced was that unanimity on the Opposition Benches in Committee is required if a guillotine is to be averted. That is another extraordinary proposition, even if one does not take into account the fact that some of the most striking speeches in Committee were made by Labour Back Benchers in complete contradiction to everything that we have heard from the Government.

The Foreign Secretary referred at length to some of the minor differences of emphasis placed on this subject by Conservative Back Benchers in Committee. No one could apply that description to the contributions of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) or the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), whose powerful speeches were different in tone from and completely contradictory to everything we heard from the Government.

One of our first duties as Members of Parliament is to debate legislation. By discharging that duty, we hold Government to account and serve the interests of our constituents. We are not relieved of that duty by the fact that the Bill received a large majority on Second Reading, or that differences of view on the Bill's contents are expressed by hon. Members from both sides of the House.

The Foreign Secretary has moved to guillotine an important constitutional Bill after just 12 hours in Committee. The Bill puts into British law the treaty agreed at Amsterdam. The treaty transfers significant powers from the House and from those whom we are elected to serve, to the European Union.

The Bill is not just another measure relating to domestic affairs, making some adjustment to our domestic arrangements that could easily be put right by another measure in some future Parliament. It is not even a domestic constitutional Bill, such as those for devolution in Scotland and Wales, which could be repealed by future legislation. The Bill enshrines in law a treaty that has been negotiated with our partners in Europe. No future Parliament can undo its provisions unless the Government of the day are prepared to renegotiate the treaty.

What makes the Bill doubly significant is that it reduces the powers of this Parliament. By simultaneously reducing the ability of the member states to veto European legislation and increasing the power of the European Parliament to veto that legislation, it diminishes the powers of the House. That is why the guillotine motion is so obnoxious. It means that these momentous decisions will be taken without full and proper debate.

This is the second time in six months that the Government have stifled debate on a major constitutional issue, and this latest decision is all of a pattern with the contempt that they have shown for Parliament since 1 May. There has been the change without consultation in the format of Prime Minister's questions, a change which I suspect the Prime Minister is already beginning to regret. There is an obsession with making announcements anywhere but in the House, and there has even been the failure of a Minister to turn up to reply to an Adjournment debate. Those are formidable manifestations of the arrogance of the Government's attitude to Parliament.

Of course, the list does not end there. Since taking office, the Government have made plain their intention to whittle away the powers of the House and of those who sent us here, and to transfer them to assemblies elsewhere in Britain, to Europe, to the Bank of England and to an unelected judiciary. When the Government treat the House with contempt, they treat with contempt those who send us here. This motion is just the tip of that iceberg.

The guillotine motion is the most draconian way to silence debate that exists in Parliament. "Erskine May" is clear. Under "Allocation of Time Orders (Guillotines)" it states:

"They may be regarded as the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities of the House, and it cannot be denied that they are capable of being used in such a way as to upset the balance, generally so carefully preserved, between the claims of business and the rights of debate."

Governments have traditionally sought to guillotine debate only after it has become clear that insufficient progress is being made. "Erskine May" also states:

"An allocation of time order is not usually moved . . . until the rate of progress in Committee has provided an argument for its necessity."

However, this arrogant and disdainful Government moved to guillotine the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill before it had even reached Committee. On this Bill, if the Government are so concerned about time and progress, why have they not moved a single closure motion? They have not made one complaint about our speed of progress so far. The Government now intend to cram the rest of the Committee debate on the Bill and Report and Third Reading into just two days. How can Ministers credibly argue that the timetable gives the House sufficient time to scrutinise legislation?

Qualified majority voting, the co-decision procedure, institutional change, flexibility, the free movement of people, discrimination, subsidiarity, proportionality and the location of European institutions are all vital issues of constitutional importance, and the Government deem it fit to debate them, if at all, for just a few hours.

"Guillotines can be justified only where an Opposition have filibustered a Bill, where they have refused all reasonable suggestions to agree a timetable, or where there is no possibility of the Government getting their business through at reasonable speed without a guillotine."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1988; Vol.126, c.756.]

Those are not my words: they are the words of the present Home Secretary. I challenge the Foreign Secretary to tell the House which, if any, of those conditions have

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been fulfilled in this case. There has been no question of a filibuster, no suggestion of agreeing a timetable has been put to us, and there is absolutely no reason why the Government should not get their business through at reasonable speed without the guillotine.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman asks why we have not come and asked the Opposition to agree to a timetable motion and I must answer, although I do not think that it is an answer he will find comfortable. We have not come and asked him to agree to a voluntary timetable motion, because we knew that he could not deliver his own Back Benchers. As he has discovered all these weighty arguments against a guillotine motion, will he now tell the House which of the arguments he advanced inside the Conservative Government when they guillotined the Bill that became the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which introduced the poll tax?

Mr. Howard: These arguments were highly relevant to that Bill—the conditions were fulfilled. That is the difference between the two cases.

Let me make the position clear. There are those of my hon. Friends who can argue the case tonight on the basis that no guillotine is justified, but I do not argue the case on that basis. Of course I recognise that guillotines can be justified, but I accept the criteria that I have just put forward. Those criteria, or at least one of them, have to be met if a guillotine is to be justified. All the Foreign Secretary could say in answer to my challenge to identify which of the three criteria was being used to justify this guillotine was not to identify any of them, but to give a reason why the Government had not even approached the Opposition with an offer for an agreed timetable for the rest of the Bill.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for showing his characteristic courtesy to me. With 1997 hindsight, can he now say that the guillotining of the poll tax legislation was justified? That Bill imposed the poll tax on Scotland a year ahead of its introduction in England, and was, in my view, the beginning of the end for Scottish Conservative representation in this House.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to his view on the merits of that legislation, but the justification for the guillotine was ample. If he goes back and sees the extent to which these criteria applied to that Bill, he will find his answer.

There are, of course, some who claim that the constitutional issues to which I have referred are not really of any interest to people, and that people are really interested only in the nitty-gritty issues such as jobs; but I do not share that view. I think that the people of this country are keenly interested in their rights and freedoms and the extent to which those will survive; but even on the least abstract test—the extent to which people's jobs and livelihoods will be affected—the Bill is of supreme importance, because it would incorporate the social chapter into our law. It would enable our European partners and our competitors to force us to impose on British business the burdens that are having such a significant impact on their own firms.

Jacques Delors said that the social chapter opt-out won by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) would make the United Kingdom

"a paradise for Japanese investment".

He was right. Because we have a flexible labour market, excellent industrial relations and low overheads, Britain's firms have been able to take on and beat the competition. That is why we have created the jobs and why unemployment has come down, but that opt-out will now be ended. There are already proposals on the table to which even the Labour Government are opposed, but which we shall be powerless to prevent as a result of the Bill. What an outrage that such a far-reaching measure should be subjected to the guillotine.

I now turn to the areas of the Bill that have yet to be discussed in Committee—vital areas, about which we will barely have time to say a word or two because of the guillotine.

We are opposed to the extensions of qualified majority voting and the co-decision procedure agreed at Amsterdam, because they would take power from this Parliament and give it to Brussels. On institutional changes, we fail to understand why the Government agreed to more powers for the President of the Commission. Why should he have the power to veto Commissioners recommended by the member states? What was the justification for a change that takes power from democratically elected Governments and gives it to an unelected official?

On the question of free movement of people, we support the British opt-out on frontiers. It was not I who had the privilege of negotiating that opt-out, nor have I ever suggested that it was, but it was a Conservative Foreign Secretary who secured agreement to it. Policy on frontier controls, asylum and immigration should be decided in Britain, not in Brussels.

We must have an opportunity to debate the Government's extraordinary allegations about the behaviour of the Spanish and Dutch Governments at and after the Amsterdam summit. The Government of the United Kingdom are alleging that those governments did a private deal in the margins of the summit, failed to report it to the other members of the Council, and smuggled it into the treaty. In other words, say the Government, they cheated.

That is a truly astonishing allegation. What confidence does it foster in the decision-making process of the European Union? After all, no self-respecting golf club would allow two members of its committee to do a hole-in-the-corner deal, keep it secret from the rest of the committee, and smuggle it through into the minutes of the committee decision.

We are told that the Government made representations to the Dutch presidency, but they clearly did not think it serious enough to raise at the Luxembourg summit. Why on earth not? Why on earth did they not complain at that gathering? We know that the Dutch Government are concerned about the allegations. We know that they wrote to the British Government about them as long ago as 16 July, but the Government refuse to publish that letter.

We are continually being told about the Government's devotion to open government. Indeed, the treaty of Amsterdam introduces a requirement for the European Union to espouse the cause of open government.

Why, then, will not the Government publish the letter of 16 July? I hope that the Minister will deal fully with that point when he replies to the debate.

I have not dealt this evening with all the shortcomings of the Amsterdam treaty; it would not have been appropriate to do so, serious and far-reaching though those shortcomings are. The treaty was as bad for what it omitted as for what it included—nothing to stop quota hopping, nothing to reform the European Court of Justice, and nothing to help enlargement. The treaty was a negotiating failure for the Government: bad for Britain and bad for Europe.

We have opposed the Bill in a constructive and measured way. We believe that it is necessary to scrutinise the details; we believe that it is necessary to question Ministers on the effects of the various provisions; we believe that it is necessary to explore the implications of the transfer of powers that the treaty provides. This guillotine will make it impossible for us to discharge those essential constitutional details. It is the action of an arrogant and complacent Government, who have no respect for this House. That is why we shall oppose it in the Lobby tonight.

8.56 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The great Arizona senator, Morris Udall, was once asked why the convention of the Democratic party, of which he was such a distinguished member, lasted for four days. He said, "It is really quite simple. After two days, everything had been said, but not everyone had said it." For those who have had any connection with the Second Reading or Committee stage of the Bill, that judgment applies as equally and acutely as it possibly could. Everything that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, in outraged tones redolent of his previous practice, seemed to me to be things that I had heard before—if not from him, from the phalanx of eager-faced young men recently elected to the House of Commons and anxious to make their mark on the Benches of the Conservative party. Those of us who have sat through—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are your colleagues?"] They have every confidence in me to deal with these matters.

Those of us who had to listen to the Conservative party's participation in the debate felt that there was nothing new to be said.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Campbell: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is about to demonstrate that once again.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. and learned Gentleman's observations would carry more weight if he had been in the House for rather more of the Committee stage.

Mr. Campbell: That is untrue; I have been present for 80 or 90 per cent. of the Committee stage. That compares pretty favourably with other hon. Members. *Hansard* will show that many of the speeches have been repetitious, rehearsing points that had been made on Second Reading. Indeed, in some cases they were merely a rehearsal of the speeches made on Second Reading.

Therefore, when the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe presents himself with such enthusiasm and anxiety to protect the interests of his constituents, he would do well to reflect on the fact that virtually everything he said in support of that proposition has been said in the House not once, but many times on and since Second Reading.

It is unacceptable that a Bill of this importance should be allowed to make so little progress. Between Second Reading and the Committee stage, more than 20 hours have been devoted to the Bill in the House. All the issues to which I have referred have been canvassed and we are barely past the second group of amendments.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: Not for the moment.

I have noted with interest not only the duration of Conservative Members's speeches, but the number of interventions that they have made and the number of artificial interventions that they have made on each other. That, perhaps more than anything else, gives the lie to the notion that there has been no effort at stringing the Bill out and at filibuster.

It has not only been the length of speeches or the frequency of interventions: some of the quality of argument has shown that there is no serious intent to deal with the issues that the Bill raises.

For example, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe became very exercised about article J16 and the role of the Secretary-General of the Council, high representative for the common foreign and security policy. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he had the powers of a Metternich or a Kissinger, but when we read the article, we find that the high representative

"shall assist the Council in matters coming within the scope of the common foreign and security policy, in particular through contributing to the formulation, preparation and implementation of policy decisions, and, when appropriate and acting on behalf of the Council at the request of the Presidency, through conducting political dialogue with third parties."

It would be hard to imagine a more lukewarm job specification for someone acting in the common foreign and security policy arena. That sort of argument in the debate was as much of a window on the attitude of the Conservative Opposition as were the duration of their speeches or the frequency of their interventions.

As has been pointed out, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) described the treaty, for which the Bill is the enabling instrument, as a mouse of a treaty. Of course, in those days, the official position of Her Majesty's Opposition was that, so important were the issues raised by the Bill—they were so fundamental constitutionally—that there had to be a referendum. The referendum, along with the baseball cap, appears to have disappeared from the political scene, but that does not alter the fact that the Bill does not justify the apocalyptic terms in which it has been described, or the synthetic description of the consequences of the guillotine motion that is to be passed by the House.

I would prefer it if it were not necessary to guillotine legislation at all, but that could be achieved only if we were to adopt what the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons has accepted,

[Mr. Campbell]

for the purpose of experiment, as a matter at least of principle: that all Bills should be timetabled from the beginning, so that there would be proper opportunity for scrutiny of all relevant parts of all Bills, and there would not be either the need to impose guillotines or encouragement to create circumstances in which guillotines might be imposed.

As the Bill has gone through the three Committee days on the Floor of the House, it has been obvious that the official Opposition were almost willing the Government to impose a guillotine, so that the official Opposition could reflect the synthetic anger and anxiety of which we have heard so much. It was clearly part of the tactic. Unable to deal the merits of the argument, they think that there may be something a little more substantial to attack in the imposition of a guillotine.

The Bill should be passed as soon as possible. It is in the interests of all our constituents—

Mr. Swayne: Subjects.

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman thinks of our constituents as subjects, and if that was a common view among Conservative candidates at the general election, it is perhaps not surprising that so few Conservative Members were returned to Parliament. I did not hear my Conservative opponent saying that the electors were all subjects, but perhaps Conservative candidates in other parts of the United Kingdom thought that that was the appropriate way to proceed. If so, it would explain their lack of numbers.

The Bill should be passed as soon as possible. By the time the terms of the guillotine motion have been implemented, the Bill will have been allotted sufficient time. It is in the interests of our constituents that it should be passed, which is why I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the Government in the Lobby tonight.

9.5 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): One thing that has to be said about the Committee stage of the Bill that enshrined the Maastricht treaty in law—I had the honour to play a part in it—was that there was no guillotine. My colleagues and I who took part in the Maastricht debate were trying to guess how many times the Government had to bring the Committee stage to a close. We may not be absolutely correct, but we guess that it was about 30 times. If that is the case, I had the honour to vote against the closure 30 times, as did several of my hon. Friends who are here now.

The then Government used the usual procedures of the House in dealing with a highly controversial Bill that they could have guillotined. They had the power to guillotine it and certainly had the votes. The Opposition, who were in collusion with the Government on the matter at that time, would no doubt have abstained or faded into the night, and the Government would have got the guillotine motion. However, the Government chose not to take that route.

It is perfectly legitimate for my hon. Friends, and especially my colleagues on the Front Bench, to argue that it would have been appropriate to use the usual procedures to deal with a highly contentious Bill now. As I understand it, part of the Government's argument is that this is not a very important Bill. They say that we are making too much fuss about it. I have to say—this may surprise my colleagues as much as it surprises the Government—that large parts of the Bill are simply more of what we already have.

We have not yet got to the foreign and security policy aspects of the Bill, but, when we do, we will find that they are simply more of what we have had before. The same is true of qualified majority voting—one can happily argue that, to some extent, the pass was sold on the principles of QMV. It might also be contentious to say from the Opposition Benches that the social chapter provisions were pretty well established through the parts of the treaty dealing with health and safety. I would make the same case for the frontier opt-out which matters enormously to the Danes. However, the opt-out can be circumvented.

I suspect that one would not need to be a very clever lawyer in the European Court to start arguing about the frontier opt-out on the grounds of competition policy, as happened with health and safety on the social chapter. Of course, it is better to have the opt-out than not to have it; nevertheless, one suspects that, in the context of the movement that Europe is making at the moment, it does not amount to a tin of beans.

Among the issues in the legislation that we will not be discussing in the detail that we should is human rights—which, one must accept, is a new matter of principle: the idea that a member state will not be expelled but will be refused its voting rights because it does not comply with the will of the majority. Ministers have asked, "Who would possibly attack or gang up on the United Kingdom on human rights grounds? Only the Greeks will be in the dock on that matter."

One could, however, quite easily conceive—as some have conceived in debates on the Bill—of circumstances in which it might be said that what we were doing in Northern Ireland, for example, was unacceptable to other member states. If they do not like what we are doing on the single currency, for example, perhaps they will gang up on us. They certainly have the power to do so, and that is the important point. The powers now exist, and that is a new step and a new matter of principle. It is an important matter, and we should have further time to debate it. Although it has been wrongly caricatured by Labour Members, the Government have conceded a new principle. Other member states will be able to gang up to remove all voting rights from one of their number. Ministers may shake their heads, but that is the established principle.

The point that really worries me is one that we have not yet debated and one which the Government make a big play of in their favour: subsidiarity. Subsidiarity was presented to those of us who had concerns about the treaty of Maastricht as one of the treaty's fig-leaves. It was always said that, in the treaty of Maastricht, we had at least started to establish some counterpoise to the movement towards a federal, centralised, socialised European state. Time and again, during that Bill's passage, the argument from both Front Benches was that we had firmly established something called subsidiarity. The wording in article 3b was said to be quite clear. It stated:

"In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity".

The wording was given as some kind of answer to hon. Members who said that we were moving inexorably towards a federal state of Europe. Some hon. Members asked, "Who will determine which matters fall within the competence of the nation state, and which matters fall within the competence of the federal state?" We never received a proper answer to that question, although it was obvious that federal institutions would ultimately determine which bits they would have the goodness of heart to cast back to national authorities. Those bits were few. I remember having long discussions about planning decisions, many of which were to be reserved or at least held at the discretion of the federal authority.

Ministers have said with great excitement that, in the treaty of Amsterdam, they have now somehow achieved something on subsidiarity, and that they have really—for once, they say—established some firmness of definition and of purpose.

Mr. Swayne: The Foreign Secretary said it himself.

Mr. Robin Cook: I did not say it.

Sir Michael Spicer: If the Foreign Secretary did not say it, it does not really matter, because we need to be concerned only with the wording. Paragraph (2) of the protocol on subsidiarity states:

"The application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality shall respect the general provisions and objectives of the Treaty, particularly as regards the maintaining in full of the acquis communautaire and the institutional balance; it shall not affect the principles developed by the Court of Justice regarding the relationship between national and Community law".

There we have it. Some of us have always argued—in that sense, we do not get desperately excited about the Bill because it is just more of the same—that we have been moving in a clear and apparently irreversible direction; we have maintained our position on the basis that two forces are moving us towards a federal state. First, there is the apparently inexorable move towards monetary union, with all the effects on monetary policy and the transfer of reserves, and—as we argue strongly—in terms of fiscal policy. We cannot have a single monetary policy without a single fiscal policy, not least because the two have to be run in tandem, but also because a single price system without a single wage system throughout Europe must mean a massive transfer of funds from rich to poor nations. That must be combined with a central taxation feature. Of course, all the institutional arrangements for that are in place.

The process is inexorable. I know that at least one of my right hon. Friends says that there is a distinction between a federal state and a single currency state—or a system in which there is a single currency. However, I cannot understand how that can be true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman and perhaps other hon. Members that this is not a general debate on Europe. We are talking about the allocation of time.

Sir Michael Spicer: I understand that, and I shall move straight on to my next point.

The section on subsidiarity in the treaty of Amsterdam has to be seen in the context of what is happening in Europe. It relates in particular to the second force that is working inexorably towards a federal state—the European Court of Justice.

We should have time to discuss the treaty and the protocol, which are of intense importance because, for the first time, they enshrine into the European Court of Justice and into the concept of the acquis communautaire the concept of subsidiarity. Until now, that has been left vague. Some of us said that it was too vague and that it was being used as an excuse for moving towards a federal state, but now it is enshrined in the treaty. The European Court has derived its powers largely from itself—it has built up its own powers through various court cases with Sabena, giving it priority to set up new law, the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, giving it priority over domestic Parliaments, and acquis communitaire, giving it the powers of occupied territory to move further forward in one direction.

Now, in the treaty of Amsterdam, the Government are blowing their own trumpet and trying to get away with the argument that the enshrinement of subsidiarity somehow provides a balance. In the treaty of Amsterdam, they have enshrined the concept and handed it over to the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Swayne: May I ask my hon. Friend how long he suspects that subsidiarity might survive, given that article B of the treaty says:

"The Union shall set itself the following objectives".

The fourth such objective is

"to maintain in full the acquis communitaire and build on it"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not be encouraged to answer that intervention. I have already made the point that we are talking specifically about the allocation of time.

Sir Michael Spicer: Of course I understand. If I may be so bold as to say so, my point fits directly into the question that my hon. Friend has just asked me. We are not being given enough time to discuss paragraph 2 of the protocol on subsidiarity which is a central part of the Amsterdam treaty—it is the part which the Government swank about. As my hon. Friend pointed out, this time the acquis communautaire is being connected to subsidiarity and the whole matter handed over to the European Court to determine what should be subsidiary and what should not.

That is a major new step. The Government should not be allowed to get away with making such assertions about legislation. That is one of the central reasons why we should have more time to discuss the matter. Governments have claimed for some time that they are retracting power from Europe through a piece of European legislation, when, in fact, they are doing precisely the opposite. Only if we have time to explore the issue will we be able to winkle that out of the Government and put them on their back foot. It is terribly important to the public understanding of what is going on through the treaty of Amsterdam that that should be so.

I rest my case, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will perhaps be glad to hear, on a point about ratification of the treaty by national Parliaments. Especially in this country, where we do not have a pattern of holding referendums, we must ensure that Parliament has time to discuss the ratification of treaties. Such treaties fundamentally affect this country's constitution in, as it happens, a progressive way, towards a federal state of Europe.

[Sir Michael Spicer]

Apart from Portugal, which may have a referendum, Denmark is the only country left with a referendum. As we shall pass the legislation in a matter of hours, this country will certainly not have much more to say about the treaty. The ratification process is becoming a matter of rubber stamping as a result of this motion.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for referring to Denmark. Is not it ominous and significant that, in Denmark, when the Euro-apologists and those who support a federal Europe did not get their way, the rules were changed? We should have more time to discuss what is involved. In Denmark, those who support a federal Europe persuaded others to undertake a second referendum. Are we going to allow a second referendum if, for instance, Denmark—again—or Portugal vote no? Are we again going to breach all the principles and time limits that formed part of the Maastricht debate on the European Community?

My hon. Friend is correct. The legislation will have a fundamental effect on our constitution, and that is why we should have more time to discuss it. We are talking not only about the European Court of Justice but a single currency. If one gives up control of one's currency, one loses control of one's economy; and if one loses control of one's economy, one loses control of one's country. Should this Parliament allow that to happen? I do not believe that it should.

Sir Michael Spicer: That was an excellent speech, and I am very pleased that my hon. Friend was able to make it.

The point that I was making was that if Parliament goes ahead with the process of rubber stamping this legislation, the only country left which will be able to try to stand its ground will be Denmark.

I end on this question: what is this all about? What are we doing? One thing that we are doing is moving towards a federal state of Europe. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) mentioned the economic aspect, and I mentioned the legislative aspect. We will not be able to get to grips with the Government's claim that the legislation is some kind of balancing act, and that there is give and take. There is not; the legislation is part of an inexorable process towards a federal state of Europe. No one has shown me why it is to the good of this country to give up our economy and our democracy. What will that be replaced with? It will certainly not be replaced with stronger democratic institutions. No new seasoned economic instrument will safeguard this country.

The treaty is of great importance because it is part of a seemingly seamless process. We should have had time to discuss the phoney element of the Government's claim that the Bill is balanced. We will not have enough time to challenge the argument that the element of subsidiarity in the Bill is a balance against all the federal moves and the changes to qualified majority voting that it contains. It is the opposite, and we should have had time to discuss that.

9.24 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I agree with some of the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer). The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) revealed what the concept of new Liberal, new Democrat means: essentially, it is that what he believes in is right and what others believe in is wrong. He is happy to have a guillotine on that basis.

The Foreign Secretary, whose talents as a forensic cross-examiner in the House have been exhilarating to witness, resorts to Tweedledum—or possibly Tweedledee—politics: the arguments that he advocated yesterday are not the ones that he advocated today. The cynicism associated with that reversal of position undermines the standing of the House, and, if I may be so frank, the standing of the Foreign Secretary himself. We are not sent here only to administer the actions of government, as the Foreign Secretary well knows. In his long 18 years in opposition, he fought many battles, one of which was opposition to the guillotine. In almost all the guillotine votes, I joined him in the Lobby to express the inappropriateness and unreasonableness of curtailing debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made the points that everyone in opposition would make.

I wish to refer closely to a note of a previous speech:

"the European Communities (Amendment) Bill is not just another Bill relating to our domestic affairs. It is not a Bill which, however objectionable to the Opposition and others and however truncated the debate on it, is still capable of repeal and replacement in a subsequent Parliament when a different party will occupy the Treasury Bench. It is not even what might be described as a domestic constitutional Bill, such as the Bill abolishing the metropolitan counties or the Bill on devolution for Scotland and Wales, for they, too, are capable of restoration or repeal in a subsequent Parliament.

What is special about the Bill is that it gives legislative effect to a treaty concluded with other nations—the member states of the EEC—and upon whose institutions it confers additional legislative powers. Once passed, this measure cannot be repealed by a subsequent Parliament, unless that Parliament is prepared to tear up the underlying treaty itself—a special dimension of difficulty which I do not believe many . . . Members have even given serious thought to."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1986; Vol. 100, c. 937.]

Those words were spoken in opposition to the Single European Act by the then Shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney—now Lord Shore. That is the essence of this Bill and why it is important to us.

The Bill is a transfer from democratic institutions to other arrangements which are not democratic. The treaty gives more power to the European Parliament, extends competencies, extends qualified majority voting, redefines or re-emphasises citizenship and deals with other matters, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe pointed out. No one doubts that those issues are important; that is why we are fighting and struggling for a form of democracy that the Government are prepared—as were the previous Government—to wave goodbye to. There was seen to be greater grasp in conceding the democratic right to change the laws under which we live, but the equality of citizens is the first trust of democracy.

I have heard many a fine speech on these matters by the Foreign Secretary, but that is all out of the window now. Office has converted and changed his view, and that saddens me. In those days, the right hon. Gentleman contended fiercely with Sir Malcolm Rifkind across the Floor of the House; we well remember that. I believed—perhaps wrongly—that the trust that he held then in the democratic and detailed discussion of these points was important.

I take the imposition of a guillotine at this stage very seriously. Some 19 hours have been cited—in 19 hours a detail is passed away. I will now explain why this is important, and the contribution of the Single European Act, which went through with a guillotine motion far worse than the one that we are debating today. I accept all that. I disliked it then and I thought it inappropriate and wrong.

It is interesting that none of us understood entirely the weight of the argument. We were given assurances by Ministers that the Act could not be interpreted in certain ways. Those assurances were given and accepted in good faith, but we discovered—as they unwound—that they did not amount to much. Circumstances, judgments made by others elsewhere and qualified majority voting changed our understanding of the weight of constitutional arrangements. The unpicking of Maastricht laid open to the House the full ambition of this new constitutional arrangement.

Perhaps that is what the Foreign Secretary and his Front-Bench colleagues fear, but I think not. The right hon. Gentleman was right when he mentioned that the Government did not want their programme upset. We are in a medley of vast constitutional change—unbalanced, unthought and guillotined, for this is now the third guillotine of the new Parliament.

The Foreign Secretary is right to excoriate the Conservative party's past. Many of those who voted so triumphantly for guillotines are no longer here to see the outcome of their actions. We learned, and that is why I want the Foreign Secretary and his Front-Bench colleagues to reflect solemnly on this. The argument is very important, and each clause and chapter means something. This new constitution is beyond the reach of this House—other than, as Lord Shore said, by completely repealing the legislation. I do not think that most hon. Members want that.

The Government have—without understanding, I would contend—entered into a series of new agreements. The then Conservative Government found at the time of Maastricht that they had no understanding of the overall architecture of the legislation. Ministers negotiated little bits; the Home Secretary did the home affairs bit, the Foreign Secretary did this and Treasury Ministers did that, but no one stood back to look at the overall picture. Each could say, "My little bit is not so significant, as it is all part of a piece that is fine."

The then Home Secretary—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—to whom the Foreign Secretary referred, did not even know that the Queen was a citizen. There was no understanding of the constitutional changes and that is why a guillotine is inappropriate now. The Government should seriously reflect on that point. I fear that we shall see a process of guillotines; first, on Scotland. The Welsh business has been taken off the Floor of the House. The right of every hon. Member to speak on a matter of fundamental constitutional importance is being withdrawn from us.

The new Labour Government, in their first flush, have taken this opportunity to use their Back Benchers, who have not yet weighed the responsibilities of law making—this was true of my party in the past—to make a law which is, in terms of the treaty, irrevocable and irreversible.

9.33 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I come to this debate as a new Member; it is the first timetable debate in which I have taken part. Faced with a new Government who came to office talking about openness, change and cleaning up after those frightful Tories, one would have thought that the examples that they were quoting in the debate would not be examples from the previous Government—but that is what we are faced with. They cited the Single European Act 1985, and the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, cited the poll tax debates, to which I shall return in detail in a moment.

I have looked back at the various precedents. We have had 12 hours discussion in Committee on the Bill so far, and much of the talking has been done by Members from the Government side. The Minister for Europe spent an hour carefully summing up the points made by Members of all parties. That was a proper consideration in Committee of a treaty of fundamental importance. Once the treaty is signed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made absolutely clear, there is no way back except with the nuclear bomb of repealing the treaty in its entirety.

We have sat in Committee for three days. Each day we have started late—almost as late as 6 pm—and we have ended at 10 pm. I am not a zealot who says that we must discuss everything endlessly and that a minority should be allowed to obstruct Government business, but the Single European Act 1985 had 17.5 hours discussion in Committee, and that discussion was clearly subject to filibuster and obstruction by opponents of the treaty. I understand that up to an hour on each occasion was taken up with points of order, and clear delaying tactics were used. The Government's justification for introducing a guillotine was clear under "Erskine May", as my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary said.

An extremely useful document from the Public Information Office of the House of Commons goes further and says:

> "The guillotine is not lightly used, and is not applied without reason. The usual reason is to counter delaying tactics . . . amounting, in the government's view, to obstruction."

We have not had that in the 12 hours consideration of the Bill in Committee. I have listened to contributions from Members on both sides, and they have been constructive. I made one contribution myself. It is hardly as though certain hon. Members had constantly been getting up to obstruct the Government's purpose. So constructive were the contributions that it took the Minister for Europe an hour to sum up on the first occasion.

As a new Member, I wanted to find out whether 12 hours was a long time to consider the Bill in Committee. After all, we are only dealing with a treaty that we cannot do anything with. The motion will mean that we have considered it in Committee for less than 20 hours in total.

I looked up the other Bills that have been considered in this Session.The Finance Bill had 36.5 hours consideration in Committee, and that was not a Committee of the whole House, as it was not a measure of constitutional significance and parts of it can be repealed if the House so wishes; the Bank of England Bill had 30 hours consideration in Committee; and this Bill has had 12.

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

We heard sedentary interventions from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)—or perhaps I should call him the Minister for beef on the bone and vitamin B6, as he has shown his contempt for the ability of the British people to make their own decisions and could be an embodiment of the nanny state. He spoke about the poll tax; when that legislation was before the House there had been 16 Committee sittings and 13 clauses had been considered before the Government introduced the guillotine motion. Indeed, after that guillotine motion there were a further 18 sittings. If that is the precedent that the Government are citing today, it is a pretty shabby and self-evidently thin one to present to the House on a measure of constitutional significance.

It was 110 years ago that Sir William Harcourt warned that great

"constitutional measures might be pushed through the House in a fortnight when the guillotine procedure was first introduced . . . All our parliamentary safeguards are now swept away.

Sir William was talking about the theoretical possibility of the disestablishment of the Church of England. We are faced here with a treaty which, once ratified by Parliament, we can do nothing more about in this place. The warning that Sir William gave 110 years ago is a real warning today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills talked about joining the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), in opposing previous guillotine motions. On those occasions, the right hon. Gentleman was on the other side of the debate. On 22 February 1977, the right hon. Gentleman will find that he was voting on a guillotine measure on the Wales Bill. The right hon. Gentleman's principles seem to change, depending on which side of the Chamber he is sitting.

We are faced with a treaty of profound importance. In discussions about defence, I have talked about the progressive framing of a common defence policy—a significant Government concession. We have been discussing that policy in Committee at the same time as Defence Ministers of the United Kingdom, Germany and France have given instructions to their aerospace industries to produce proposals by 31 March for the reunification of a European aerospace industry.

There is an agenda of stealth and we are seeing it implemented before our eyes. The Government are forcing through decisions by cutting short discussions in Committee. At the same time, significant issues are running in tandem which are fundamentally changing the United Kingdom's position in the world, in Europe and in the United States. These issues are not being discussed because there is no opportunity to do so in the House.

We were in the middle of discussing qualified majority voting when the motion was put before the House. We heard the Foreign Secretary talking about a mandate from the electorate. He referred to the trust that it had been given and talked about the social chapter. The right hon. Gentleman did not set out the Government's policies on QMV. I accept that he promised to try to extend QMV in four areas, but he succeeded only in one: employment policy. The right hon. Gentleman conceded that there were 14 other areas on which the British electorate had no idea that it was being asked to vote on 1 May, including public health.

We had to listen to the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is turning into a pretty impressive food fascist. What we must endure from the hon. Gentleman is what the House and the Government will be able to do nothing about when faced with a diktat from the majority of member states of the European Union. We shall not have time to discuss these issues. We are left with the possibility of only about seven hours of debate in Committee.

The details of the treaty are not understood outside this place. I thought that we were sent to the House to get into the nitty-gritty of these issues. How can we expect our constituents to get to grips with these issues and understand them? It is a task which is virtually impossible except for those of us who are prepared to go through the detail, with the time to do so.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend said that people outside the House—the electorate, Mr. and Mrs. average citizen—do not understand what the issue is all about. Why, then, does every public opinion poll on entry into the single currency and further integration into Europe—the development of a federal state—show a substantial majority against? I believe that our people fundamentally understand the matter. That is why I believe that the House needs more time to explore the issues.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend is right to a degree. People have an instinctive understanding of the issues, but it cannot be a detailed understanding. They do not have the time to go through it. I worked in the Foreign Office for 18 months. Getting to grips with and preparing for the Committee on this legislation, working it through detail by detail, took far longer than what I did there. It deals with vital issues of national interest, especially defence and qualified majority voting. Hon. Members will identify issues of special concern to them.

Mr. Winterton: Is not one of the great problems that the House and the people outside whom we have the honour to represent face that people such as the Foreign Secretary—for whose manner of dealing with the matter in the past I have had immense respect and who before the general election was strongly anti-Europe—are now so positively pro-Europe?

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend makes a brilliant point. We have watched most Labour Members turn themselves upside down on European policy not once, twice or three times, but four or five times in the past three decades. They are victims of fashion. They have no idea or understanding of where the basic interests of the United Kingdom lie. That is why they can table a measure to curtail discussion in Committee.

It is surely our duty to examine the Bill in detail constructively. We have not obstructed the Government. We have made proper progress on the Bill in Committee, yet we are now presented with a timetable motion with no warning, no suggestion through the usual channels that our guys are taking too long. It was suddenly banged down after we had made consistent progress over three

days. We were into the fourth day of discussion of serious issues. We were discussing qualified majority voting. We were taking part in constructive debate. It would have been fair enough to table the motion if no progress was being made, if the Opposition had been obstructing debate, but we were not. Conservative Members took care to ensure that there would be no grounds for the Government to make such a charge.

As a new Member, I have seen the House treated with contempt month after month since my arrival at the beginning of May. When the Government treat the House with contempt, they treat the people with contempt. We are told that nanny knows best. In the end, the children will grow up and they will understand what has been done to them in this House.

9.47 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am pleased to have been present for a good part of our deliberations on this subject, because it is a matter of great significance and importance to the House and the nation. It is now clear that the Government do not see it that way. If they did, they would not have tabled the guillotine motion.

I can do no better than amplify the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). I, too, went to "Erskine May". As a new Member, I sought guidance. I have not the experience, wit or charm of the Foreign Secretary. I am a humble patriot and a representative of ordinary men and women who value their freedom and independence. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe has already suggested, "Erskine May" describes the use of the guillotine as

"the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities".

It goes on to say that the harshness of the procedure is

"to some extent mitigated either by consultation between the party leaders or in the Business Committee".

Has there been appropriate and proper consultation between the party leaders on the tonight's guillotine? I suggest that there has not. The introduction of this guillotine has been exercised with ruthless disregard not only for the House but for the subject of the debate.

After looking at "Erskine May", I considered the precedent for the use of guillotines. In this regard, I refer hon. Members to the debate on 1 July 1986, when the then right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, now a Labour peer, Lord Peter Shore, debated the European Communities (Amendment) Bill—not the one that we are dealing with today, but an earlier incarnation. On that occasion, he argued forcefully against the use of the guillotine. What grounds did he use? He said that the Bill was:

"not just another Bill relating to our domestic affairs . . . it is a Bill that directly affects the power of Parliament.

What is special about the Bill is that it gives legislative effect to a treaty concluded with other nations—the member states of the EEC—and upon whose institutions it confers additional legislative powers. Once passed, this measure cannot be repealed by a subsequent Parliament, unless that Parliament is prepared to tear up the underlying treaty itself".—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1986; Vol.100, c.937.]

Precisely the same words could be used in tonight's debate. I am sure that Lord Shore would share the same opinion about the Government's behaviour tonight.

After studying "Erskine May" and precedent, I sought an explanation for the Government's extraordinary course of action. I studied the evidence given by the Foreign Secretary to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on 4 November 1997. Of course, much of the loss of power which the Amsterdam treaty offers to the British people relates to the extension of qualified majority voting and subsequent loss of our veto. The right hon. Gentleman said of that:

"The use of the veto should only be exercised in circumstances of gravity and importance. The veto should not be exercised in circumstances which are frivolous or marginal."

The treaty will, however, reduce the powers of this sovereign state to veto legislation and it will extend to the procedures which allow for QMV in a range of areas. Perhaps those areas could be judged frivolous or marginal. Let us test them. Is employment policy frivolous and marginal? Is public health policy frivolous? What about equal opportunities—perhaps that is a little more frivolous, but I will not comment too much on that. *[Interruption.]* No, I do not want to distress the Stepford wives—there are only a couple of them here, but I do not want to upset them. Is regional policy frivolous and marginal? Is customs policy frivolous and marginal? Of course not. None of those policies is frivolous or marginal.

We have already heard a great deal about the treaty in respect of those policies, but I want to explore the fundamental truth about the treaty—it is a significant attack on British sovereignty. *The Daily Telegraph*—which I imagine is not widely read by Labour Members—*[Interruption.]* I look at *The Guardian* now and again—for the sport. *The Daily Telegraph* described the treaty as a degree of constitutional masochism and a

"self-mutilation of our democratic institutions."

A parallel difficulty in assessing the nature and extent of that mutilation is caused by the fact that the injuries are obscured by the coded nature of the language used to describe the problem.

The nature of the European debate is deliberately obscured and the plain facts distorted either by dressing them up in esoteric rhetoric or by the Euro-technique of using bizarre and colourful metaphors. We all know what they are: we are on a train or in a fast car or a slow car—presumably not a racing car, in the light of current circumstances. In short, we are always on some sort of journey to a pre-ordained destination over which we have little choice. It is rather like going on holiday to a place that one knows little about and will not especially like; the assumption is that that is the only place available to spend the vacation.

The result of this esoteric European debate is that the ordinary man and woman in the street feels isolated and remote from it, powerless to do anything about it. The saddest phrase that a democrat can hear is one that we frequently hear about the debate on Europe: "We don't understand it, so we leave it to other people. We aren't sure what it means, so we have to leave it to the experts." When a democrat hears such expressions from ordinary voters he—or she—should be very sad indeed.

Now, let us examine in detail what the treaty actually does. We heard in earlier speeches some discussion of unemployment. In that context, I want to draw particular attention to article 13, with which hon. Members will, no doubt, be familiar. The inclusion of religion, belief and

[Mr. John Hayes]

sexual orientation in the article—we are back to equal opportunities here—establishes a principle which may be given legal effect by the European Court of Justice. That could mean that Church schools could lose their freedom to employ only staff who support the ethos of the school. Faith-based voluntary organisations in the private sector could also be affected. Article 13 could restrict their freedom of association and their ability to employ only people who profess and practise in accordance with the organisation's beliefs and that, of course, does not apply to Christians alone. Employment law changes created by article 13 could have dramatic effects on those areas.

We have also heard about the worrying extension of the powers of the European Court of Justice over a range of other areas, and the greater powers for the secretary-general of the Commission, with little or no accountability, in foreign and security policy. There is also, of course, the matter that we were discussing before the guillotine motion was introduced—the significant extension of qualified majority voting.

Is this all in line with what we were promised when we decided to join the European Community? Of course not. Hon. Members will remember what happened at the time. As a young Conservative, I campaigned for a yes vote. I am prepared to bare my soul now and admit that. I was duped along with all the rest.

Indeed, I am still in favour of an association of sovereign nations, a free-trade Europe with countries combining and co-operating to get the best possible deal for their citizens. Of course Conservatives are pro-Europe—[*Laughter.*]—but pro-Europe in the sense and the spirit in which the people of Britain voted for Europe in the first place.

We were expressly told that there was no possibility of federalism. Do we all remember? To illustrate, I shall quote from the document that was distributed at the time, "Britain's New Deal in Europe". I remind Labour Members that many of them will have helped to distribute that document and used it to defend the idea of a yes vote in the referendum.

"Britain's New Deal in Europe" says:

"No important new policy can be decided in Brussels or anywhere else without the consent of a British Minister answerable to a British Government and a British Parliament. The top decision-making body in the Market is the Council of Ministers, which is composed of senior Ministers representing each of the nine member Governments. It is the Council of Ministers, not the Common Market officials, who take important decisions".

It is hard to believe that now.

The document continued:

"These decisions can only be taken if all the members of the Council agree. The Minister representing Britain can veto any proposal for a new law or a new tax if he considers it to be considered to be against British interests".

We have travelled a long and sorry road since then, and all without the consent of the British people.

The Foreign Secretary listed the items to which qualified majority voting is being extended. They include employment guidelines, employment incentive measures, social exclusion, sexual discrimination, public health, transparency, countering fraud, statistics, the data protection advisory body, outermost regions and Customs co-operation. He failed to tell us that the Amsterdam treaty allows states to make general agreements and to outline broad policy, and then to thrash out the detail under qualified majority voting. That category includes services and copyright negotiation, approximation of the police and the judiciary, and the common foreign and security policy.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the European Communities (Amendment) Bill (Allocation of Time) Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Hayes: I was grateful for that interruption to gather my notes and thoughts.

The social chapter is also in that category. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe drew attention to Jacques Delors's admiration for our opt-out, and his acceptance that, in areas such as inward investment, it gave us a significant advantage over our European counterparts.

It is worth returning briefly to the issue of copyright. The resulting agreement from the treaty on copyright seems to have been decided by qualified majority voting. If so, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not noticed that yet. It remains to be seen what long-term effect that will have on the importance of the German-based European copyright centre at the expense of the national office in the United Kingdom. I suspect that the London office will go out of business, and that will be another item of bad news for Great Britain.

The single currency has also been mentioned in the debate. I do not want to indulge in repetition. The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said that repetition added nothing to the debate. I was reminded of how spiteful and vicious people in the centre of politics often are. People with strong, committed opinions on the left and the right are often accused of those vices, but some of the most vicious people are in the political centre. I do not want to be unkind to the hon. and learned Gentleman, but I had to remind him of that truth.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend has perhaps chosen the one Liberal Democrat in the House who does not merit such a description.

Mr. Hayes: Indeed, I can add little to that.

Much has been said about the economic consequences of the single currency, whereas little has been said about the symbolism of the single currency and the transfer of Britain's gold reserves to Frankfurt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing the allocation of time motion, and not these wider issues.

Mr. Hayes: Absolutely. Had we not had this restriction of time, we would have been able to develop these issues more fully. It is because the debate has been curtailed in such a ruthless, cavalier fashion that we will not have time to explore these matters more fully.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The Foreign Secretary referred time and again to the guillotine motion

introduced by the Conservative Government on the community charge legislation: more affectionately known as the poll tax. The introduction of a guillotine on that measure probably contributed to the defeat of the Conservative party in 1997. Should not thought be given to the fact that a guillotine is now being introduced on a matter of considerable importance, even though it has not been properly considered by the House? In the foreseeable future could not this guillotine lead to the defeat of new Labour and the transfer to government of the Conservative party?

Mr. Hayes: I can tell my hon. Friend that hon. Members and the wider public take a dim view of such a technique. When Parliament is scrutinised independently and empirically by the electorate, it is that sort of technique which tends to attract most criticism and contempt. As my hon. Friend suggests, Governments with large majorities and Prime Ministers with dodgy advisers—I see that the Minister without Portfolio is in his place—sometimes run to excess. I would not say that about the previous Government, but it may be a general principle.

I shall deal with the single currency and its symbolism in terms of time. We should not undersell, underplay or undervalue the principle of national identity. It is inclusive in that it brings a nation together and ensures that what unites us is greater than what divides us. We toy with national identity at our peril because, to use Blairite rhetoric, to do so would disempower the British people, not all of whom are winners or at the pinnacle of society or can reach the apex of their chosen profession or pursuit. However, they can share in the success, glory and progress of the country as a whole because they share a common national identity. We give that away in the treaty at great loss to those people especially.

I do not know whether it was through a lack of wit or a lack of will that the Government decided to sign the Amsterdam treaty. I cannot believe that it was through a lack of wit so it must have been an express lack of will. The Government have undoubtedly taken a profound step towards European political integration. I was concerned about that and I could barely believe that the Government would do it because I am a decent chap and wanted to believe the best of them so I tabled a couple of written questions to see whether the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister had left the negotiations early. I thought that perhaps the Foreign Secretary had popped out to place a bet. Not at all: he was there throughout, even when he was being stitched up by the Spanish Prime Minister on opt-ins and opt-outs—so there is no excuse. Their action will dilute our national identity, endanger our national destiny and remove the exercise of political power further and further from ordinary, decent, law-abiding patriotic people such as those whom I and other hon. Members represent.

10.7 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Some debates on this subject are becoming a little too friendly. There is a sort of convention in the House to the effect that, "Well, these things happen. Sometimes we put on guillotines and sometimes it happens the other way round. We do not need to worry too much about it. We can go through the formalities of debate but allow the whole matter to drift along." I do not feel at all friendly towards this guillotine motion. What is more, I do not feel at all friendly towards the Government. This is a creepy-crawly guillotine motion and it is being introduced in circumstances that, by any reasonable standards, do not warrant it.

I have heard my hon. Friends describing the history of the guillotine. It is crystal clear that the Foreign Secretary refused twice to reply to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) as to why, in relation to the Single European Act, he—the Foreign Secretary—was opposed to the idea to a guillotine, along with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House, yet, in relation to this Bill, the Government assume a degree of hypocrisy. They know perfectly well that the Single European Act was primarily about trade and a single market, whereas this Bill is about government.

The Bill is about the extension of those parts of the Maastricht treaty that raise the question I frequently asked during the Maastricht debate: who governs Britain? As I said to the Minister of State in the opening debate on the Bill, anybody with even a semblance of knowledge of the European Union knows perfectly well that the Amsterdam treaty is a gross extension of the integration of Europe and our absorption into a process that the Government intend will lead to the extinction of the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. They know that, just as they know their devolution Bills fall into the same category: they are all part of a continuing process of the creation of a federal Europe and this Bill is part and parcel of that process. Therefore, the Bill is, on an accumulative basis, a Bill of the highest constitutional importance and under no circumstances can the precedents for a guillotine lead us to any conclusion other than that it should not have been imposed.

The comparison between the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty is irrelevant, because the Maastricht treaty was about government. The only positive thing I can say about the previous Government's attitude and their record on the Maastricht treaty is that the one thing they did right was not to impose a guillotine on the debate on that treaty. Now, because we had those debates and went into the issues thoroughly, people can form a judgment about who was right and who was wrong. There is a deliberate conspiracy to prevent the people of this country from knowing the full extent of what is contained in the Amsterdam treaty. That is why the guillotine is being imposed.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I have immense regard for my hon. Friend and his knowledge of all the legislation relating to the European Union, but is he not being a little generous in his comments about my party—our party—when in government and its action in imposing a guillotine on the Single European Act, which limited discussion? At that time, we accepted assurances from the leadership of our party that the light of experience shows were not worth the breath with which they were uttered. We have been saddled with a reduction in sovereignty, which the then Prime Minister assured us would not happen. Surely guillotines prevent the sort of discussion that is necessary if we are to explore in detail precisely what is involved in legislation.

Mr. Cash: I am bound to say that I have believed for a long time that the single market arrangements have not worked as intended. There were some profoundly

[Mr. Cash]

misleading aspects to that legislation, but, to return to my main point, as far as I am concerned, the Single European Act was primarily about trading relations with Europe, not about the governmental functions that are demonstrable in the Maastricht treaty and in the Amsterdam treaty. There is a distinction and it is important to make that point, but I do not wish to return to the subject of the Single European Act too often. I have reservations about it. It should have been reformed, and the Amsterdam conference would have provided a reasonable opportunity to do so. Of course, the Government had not the slightest intention of doing anything of the sort.

I have noticed that, of the amendments selected for debate, some 60 per cent. are in my name. It was essential to have a significant number of groupings in order to have a proper debate. I am absolutely clear that that debate is being frustrated despite the fact that there has been no filibuster. The Minister knows that he has not accused us of a filibuster; I have not picked up in the Lobbies any suggestion that there has been one. No serious commentator has suggested that we have made any attempt to frustrate proper discussion of the Bill.

In the Amsterdam treaty, the Government signed a protocol, which is binding on the Government, to provide for proper scrutiny by national Parliaments. As a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation—which has been extremely critical of the manner in which national parliamentary scrutiny has been conducted—I find it unbelievable that we should be discussing a treaty that itself contains provisions for the improvement of national scrutiny, yet applying a principle that will deprive us of the opportunity of doing so. That is disgraceful. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about it when he replies at the end of the debate. There is no filibuster; we are seeking to have proper national scrutiny—yet the Government are denying us even what is contained in the Amsterdam treaty as a matter of principle.

It is astonishing that the Committee proceedings have been almost literally unreported in the media by any newspaper or television or radio programme. It is astonishing that a matter of such importance should be ignored by the media. There is no proper means of communication. As I said in the first debate, the best way to keep a secret is to make a speech in the House of Commons. There is evidence of that with the proceedings on this Bill.

We forced the previous Government—I make no apology for it—into serious debate of the Maastricht treaty. In fairness to the Government of the day, they gave us the debates we wanted. I tabled about 210 amendments to ensure proper discussion. However, because there was a relatively small majority and because, I think, there was a feeling in the country that huge issues of constitutional principle were involved, those debates were reported on a continuous and daily basis.

If we were to compare the governmental functions transferred under Maastricht—vital and massive as they were—with, for example, the extension of the legal area and the vast new powers being conferred on the European Court of Justice, we could conclude only that it is an absolute disgrace to hear hon. Members and Government spokesmen suggesting that this is not an important Bill. If they were to claim that they had not suggested that, I would have to ask why they would want to impose a guillotine on something they have now admitted is important. There is an inherent contradiction in their position.

As other hon. Members have said, the treaty is intended to be irrevocable. It is intended to become part and parcel of our legal framework. It is beyond belief that we should not be renegotiating the treaty. I know that my right hon. Friends had it in mind that at some time we would have a referendum on the treaty. I believe—I think that the huge majority of people in this country share this view—that we should have had, and should yet have, a proper referendum on the Maastricht treaty and, indeed, on the consolidated treaty on European Union. To confine a referendum to the single currency is to duck many of the arguments to which the British people are entitled to give their consent.

I am particularly concerned that my new clause on renegotiation should be discussed. It says that the Bill shall not come into force until there is a new European conference, at which the state of the EU would be discussed and appropriate amendments would be tabled to determine the nature and extent to which renegotiation is necessary. From listening to what Labour Members said when they were in opposition, I know that many of them believe that aspects of the consolidated treaty on European Union, the Maastricht treaty and now the Amsterdam treaty require renegotiation.

Earlier today, we had a debate on fisheries policy. I heard people talking about reform of the common agricultural policy. How the hell is it possible to argue that we must reform those policies, which are subject to treaty arrangements, and then say that we are not going to renegotiate them? Are we to engage simply in a cherry-picking operation and renegotiate only things that are unimportant? Should we not consider the state of the EU as a whole?

In the light of today's discussions, I am driven to consider which are the subjects covered by the groups of amendments that remain for the Committee to debate. After qualified majority and the co-decision procedure, which is what we are currently on, is institutional change and flexibility.

As I said to the Prime Minister when he returned from Luxembourg the other day, is there not an inherent contradiction between his claiming that he should be included in all the discussions on this strange committee entitled Euro X and the fact that the Amsterdam treaty contains provisions on flexibility, which is why he is being excluded? As the Commission said some years ago, economic and monetary union is the best form of flexibility yet devised—and it is applying the principles of flexibility to exclude us from the discussions.

I do not have any truck with monetary union, but there is a fundamental contradiction between the Government's position on Euro X and the flexibility provisions. When the new grouping comes up shortly, we should have the opportunity to discuss flexibility with respect not merely to monetary union, but to all the other matters in the treaty on European Union. Flexibility is a generalised concept. It is intended to apply across the board, but I calculate that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber will be given only one and a half hours to discuss that flexibility, the institutional changes and the free movement of persons and citizenship.

That is an outrage. The people of this country are entitled to know the views of hon. Members, who have been elected to represent them in Parliament, on fundamental questions that affect their freedoms. I am not asking for much. I ask for something small: that we be given a chance to have a proper discussion of matters that are of fundamental interest to our constituents. It is outrageous that the Government should have introduced a guillotine motion on a Bill of this constitutional magnitude, deliberately to deceive the British people into thinking that it is not as important as it really is.

There is a substantial irony in the origins of the guillotine procedure. Hon. Members may remember—or may at least have read—that it was introduced to deal with the Irish question. It was brought in to crush Parnell, who was seeking to obtain home rule for the Irish. The then Government were seeking to impose amended criminal law in Ireland, which Parnell and others opposed. Now, by an extraordinary irony, the procedure is being used to prevent us from retaining our sovereignty, which is effectively our home rule. It is being used to frustrate our sovereignty rather than enhance it. That is outrageous.

I have not heard one word from the Foreign Secretary about the fundamental principles that underpin the guillotine motion. He made a short speech full of specious and irrelevant nonsense about precedents and the Single European Act, but he is a man of great intelligence and perception and he knows perfectly well just how important the Bill is. The Government have adopted a minimalist approach and have managed, through the media, to spin doctor the message that the Bill does not really matter at all. That is one of the greatest deceits perpetrated on the British people for generations because the treaty and the Bill are hugely important, not merely politically but constitutionally. It is therefore essential that the guillotine motion is opposed.

Instead of chattering on the Front Bench, the Minister of State owes it to the House to give a proper explanation, which the Foreign Secretary denied us, of why this constitutional outrage is being perpetrated and why the guillotine is being imposed against all the relevant precedents.

10.27 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I have attended the Committee's sittings assiduously. I would say that I have been here for every minute of every sitting and have spoken on every occasion. If one were to check *Hansard*, I reckon that one would find that I spoke for between five and seven minutes each time. I did not filibuster but made the points required of me carefully and cogently. I believe that to be the case, because, had it not been, I am sure that the Chairman at any given time would have called me to order. Indeed, had it not been the case, Labour Members would not have sought to intervene to make their own cogent remarks. There has been no filibustering on this Bill.

The fact is that it was the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) who spoke for half an hour, and the Minister of State for nearly a full hour.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but the Minister of State was giving the Committee proper credit for the contributions made, and he treated the Committee with respect. I suspect that it is not his fault that we are debating the guillotine motion.

Mr. Swayne: That is indeed the case. I do not begrudge the Minister of State his hour. He was well worth listening to. In that hour, he strenuously attempted to deal with every point made by my colleagues.

I disagree with much of the Minister's analysis, but it was entirely appropriate that he should have taken an hour to express it, just as it was entirely appropriate that I should have spoken to three groups of amendments, because, during the general election campaign, anxieties on the subject matter dealt with by the Bill were expressed, entirely unsolicited, on virtually every doorstep in my constituency.

The people who expressed their concerns speak in this Chamber through me. That is the very basis of a representative democracy. This timetable motion, however, will deny them that opportunity. After Front Benchers have had their say, there will be very little time for Back Benchers to speak to the Bill.

We have a constitutional convention in the United Kingdom, although, I grant, we do not have a written constitution. We generally do not offer our people referendums, or include mandatory thresholds in those referendums. We also do not, unlike France or Germany, have a constitutional court. We do, however, have a constitutional convention, which states that, on constitutional matters, any hon. Member can have his say, without having written to the Speaker and hoping like hell that he will get a chance to speak. The convention is that any hon. Member can have his say by attending the Bill's Committee stage, which will be taken on the Floor of the House. Today's motion will ride roughshod over that convention.

It is all very well for Ministers to say, "This guillotine is your fault. If you had treated the Bill's Committee stage with some respect and not abused it, we would not have been driven to protect our parliamentary timetable for other Bills with this motion", but it was entirely disingenuous of the Secretary of State to say that the Bill has been debated on five days, because the debate on the Bill's Second Reading was entirely irrelevant to today's motion. Moreover, as he himself said, today he made another Second Reading speech. He said that the treaty will protect our borders, guarantee subsidiarity and implement Labour's election manifesto pledge to implement the social chapter. However, only by going through the Bill's detail in Committee will we discover that the treaty will do nothing of the sort. That is precisely why the Government want to kill the Bill's Committee stage; they want debate on the Bill to be silenced.

It is a matter not only of silencing hon. Members, who have every right to speak, but of using smoke and mirrors and of covering up the Second Reading speeches that have been made. A Committee of the whole House has debated the Bill for a total of 12 hours, which represents about three hours per group of amendments. That strikes me as entirely reasonable. If the Government are concerned about their legislative programme, why are they not prepared for the Committee to sit after 10 o'clock? Is the matter not of sufficient constitutional importance to do so? Do Ministers really need their beauty sleep so badly? I wonder. Why has every sitting of the Committee, with one exception, been preceded by a ministerial statement?

[Mr. Swayne]

Many hon. Members have mentioned the Single European Act 1985 in this debate. That Act was debated for three full days. As I said, the Secretary of State was disingenuous when he said that the Bill had been debated on five days. That does not mean that it was debated for five days. In fact, it was debated for 12 hours.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): The hon. Gentleman has now been speaking for seven minutes.

Mr. Swayne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for drawing my attention to that. I have made the points that I wished to make, so I shall take his cue to resume my seat.

10.34 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): However helpful or unhelpful Labour Members may be, I cannot promise that I shall be as compliant as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) in taking cues on how long I should speak.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said that the best way to keep a secret is to make a speech in the House of Commons. The reason for that is behaviour such as that of the Government this evening. It is a privilege to follow so many thoughtful and passionate speeches from my hon. Friends, but my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made an outstanding contribution to the debate. I echo his point that the standing of the House of Commons is at stake when the Government treat Parliament in such a way as to demonstrate their disregard for democracy.

The speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills was particularly important. I only wish that all new Members elected on 1 May could have heard it. I fear that many new Members do not have sufficient regard for the history, tradition and importance of this place as the guarantor of the freedom of the British people. My hon. Friend's speech brings that home.

It is desperately important that we should all remember why we are here. I am tempted to say that it is particularly important for new Labour Members, some of whom were not expecting to be elected on 1 May, but found themselves here—some with small majorities—and who may not be here for very long. Of course, we are all here for as long as our electors choose, but I fear that some who were elected on 1 May do not have sufficient regard for the institution of which we have the privilege to be Members, and that is most regrettable.

The low standing of the House of Commons has been compounded in recent months and years. I make no bones about it. Many questions and problems have been raised. Many people take the view that, at times during the past few years, the Conservative Government did not maintain the highest standards. However, what I find particularly worrying in the arguments for the guillotine motion that have been advanced rather sparingly in just one speech from the Government is the suggestion that, if the previous Government did it, it must be all right.

That is reflected in the behaviour of the new Government over the past few months. The formula one crisis involving Mr. Ecclestone gave the impression—however unjustified—that the Government may have changed their policy because they received a donation of a considerable sum of money.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I know that the hon. Gentleman has newly arrived, but I recall that, in the last Parliament, the then Conservative Government, who had a majority of 29, introduced 82 guillotine motions. I cannot remember how many there were in the 1987 Parliament, but they were awfully frequent, given the Government's majority of 100. In the 1983 Parliament, the Government had a majority of 144, and they tried to shut us up on every possible occasion.

This is the first one in the current Parliament. I admit that I have been away for part of the time, so will the hon. Gentleman explain why a Government are not allowed to get their business through? What was sauce for the goose from 1983 to 1997 is surely sauce for the gander from 1997 onwards—probably to 2010.

Mr. Brady: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking the trouble to make my point for me. That is precisely the argument that I find so distressing and unsettling.

Dr. Vis: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that Mr. Ecclestone gave £14 million to the Conservative party? If so, will he confirm that that might be related to the absence of any legislation about tobacco?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is not going to confirm anything of that nature. He is going to confine his remarks to the motion.

Mr. Brady: I am struggling to do so—although Labour Members appear to be engaging in a determined filibuster by raising matters that have no relevance whatever to the guillotine motion.

I was referring, in my valid point, to how the standing of Parliament is threatened by the behaviour in which the Government are engaging. This guillotine motion is an important instance of that. It adds to the distressing and unfortunate public view that Parliament is worthless, that it no longer represents the people of this country or has a genuine democratic function.

I am pleased to see the Foreign Secretary in his place again—almost by magic—because I am about to refer to a point that he made in his opening speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on, then."] I thank Labour Members for their helpfulness in trying to move me on to my point.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said that the Foreign Secretary gave two novel justifications for the guillotine motion in his introductory speech—first, that unanimity is required on the Opposition Benches for such business, and secondly that a very large majority on Second Reading obviates the need for a proper Committee.

I think that a third very worrying and novel justification was advanced. It was suggested that, because the Government won a large majority on 1 May, there was no need for a proper Committee stage. Democracy does not end in this country when we have a general election. It is important that we recognise that democracy continues through the Parliament. We are sent here as

representatives of our constituents, not merely to implement what may be in a rather sparse election manifesto, of whichever party.

I am tempted to say that, on 1 May, just as all Labour voters may have thought and known that they were voting for incorporation of the social chapter, they all thought and believed that they were voting against a cut in benefits for single mothers. The Foreign Secretary's argument does not stand up when he is prepared to be so selective about which parts of Labour's manifesto and which pledges are considered sacrosanct, and which ones can be thrown away without regard. That is of great concern to hon. Members.

Suggestions, especially by the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), that the Bill has been filibustered need to be refuted. There has been no filibuster. Indeed, most hon. Members would agree that good progress has been made. In 12 hours, we have spent, on average, three hours on each group of amendments.

I make no criticism of the Minister of State, but he made the longest speech of the proceedings when he spoke for almost an hour in winding up. The second longest speech was from another Labour Member. The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) spoke for 30 minutes—far longer than any Conservative Member's speech. If the Government are contending that their own Members are filibustering business, it is rather a bizarre accusation to lay at our door.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone spoke about the origins of the guillotine motion in 1887 in proceedings on the Criminal Law Amendment (Ireland) Bill. It is particularly telling that Gladstone called the proposal

"a further abridgement of Parliamentary liberty".

That was in the days when we had a Liberal party which was worthy of the name, which we no longer do.

The speech by the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife suggested that his party is also unworthy of the name of democrat. It has not only given away any claim to represent the liberal traditions of the House and British democracy, but it has given up its claim to represent any true democracy by trying to frustrate proper debate on the Bill.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: How many of the guillotine motions imposed by the previous Conservative Government in the last Parliament would the hon. Gentleman have opposed?

Mr. Brady: As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, I was not here, and it is difficult to answer a hypothetical question. I can say that one should give serious thought to a request to support a guillotine motion on a constitutional measure of the importance of the Bill. When we debate legislation that will give away power that belongs to the House, to this country and to the British people, who are sovereign, we do not have the right to throw it casually away. That is the nub of the matter.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the critical issue is the ability of this Parliament to restore or repeal legislation such as the Bill? Perhaps the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) should be more selective about guillotine measures, because the legislation is of especial constitutional importance. It is not even a domestic matter, but involves legislation that could not be subsequently repealed: that is the fundamental point.

Mr. Brady: To quote the Prime Minister for perhaps the only time, "My hon. Friend is absolutely right." I cannot add anything further to his point.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Perhaps my hon. Friend would care to reflect on the matter raised by the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). When we debated the Maastricht treaty in the last Parliament—unfortunately, my hon. Friend was not here—we sat night after night and day after day, democratically and without a guillotine motion, to discuss matters of grave constitutional importance. We are now being denied that right, and I fully support the comments that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Brady: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point.

As I was saying, it is bizarre that the only points of any substance have been made by the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife and not by the Foreign Secretary. The hon. and learned Member appeared to ridicule our demand for a referendum on the Bill, which made me wonder whether he thinks that the treaty is more or less important than the legislation that will establish the Welsh Assembly or the Scottish Parliament. Is the treaty more or less important than what the Prime Minister referred to as the creation of a sort of parish council?

I believe that the treaty is more important. We had referendums on the Scottish and Welsh issues, which are less significant constitutionally than the Bill, because it will transfer power out of the United Kingdom. However, the hon. and learned Member does not believe that it would be appropriate to engage in the same consultation of the British people as was granted to the people of Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The hon. Gentleman must be aware that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) described the Amsterdam treaty as a mouse of a treaty. In those circumstances, why do the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends attach such importance to it? Perhaps they believe that what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said was wholly unfounded.

Mr. Brady: I make no bones about the fact that I do not share the views of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe on that matter. The hon. and learned Gentleman does not answer my point about whether it is more important to establish a parish council in Edinburgh or Swansea than to transfer massive new powers to Brussels, which is outside the United Kingdom. That is the central point.

The hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife also alleged that there had been repetition in the speeches by Conservative Members, but that does not have any foundation. He has only recently faced any danger of repetition by Liberal Democrat Members, because he has been alone in his place for most of the debate. He claimed that his loneliness on the Liberal Democrat Benches showed the confidence that his Back-Bench colleagues have in his abilities. For much of the evening, that confidence clearly has been total.

Mr. Hayes: I wish to refer to the Government. Labour Members have been remarkably silent; not one, other than

[Mr. Hayes]

the Foreign Secretary, has spoken so far. Are we witnessing not only a deliberate attempt to suppress the views of the House as a whole on a major constitutional issue, but the use of the iron discipline of the Government Whips to prevent Labour Members from saying anything on the motion?

Mr. Brady: Again, it would be a great cause for concern if Labour Members with a view on a matter of such constitutional significance were dissuaded from speaking their minds.

Dr. Vis: We have heard a lot about filibustering. I have been sitting here for an hour, and the last three Conservative Members have repeated one another. Why does the hon. Gentleman not speak to the motion? We have heard nothing about it. He should speak his mind, rather than saying he is not filibustering. I have heard 17 times that he is not filibustering.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) certainly is not filibustering, because I would stop him if he were doing so.

Mr. Brady: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have seen no evidence, either this evening or on other occasions, that the Chair has been anything other than punctilious in controlling the House. The hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) has made two lengthy interventions during my speech, which leads me to wonder whether he, rather than my hon. Friends, is trying to filibuster.

It is important to stand up for the rights of Back Benchers in these important matters, so that we do not limit our consideration merely to what our Front-Bench colleagues say. The Government's attitude to Parliament, which we see again in this measure—as we have seen so often since 1 May—demonstrates a lack of confidence in their own ability to make a case. They are concerned that, if they come here and allow a proper, full debate, their case will not stand up to scrutiny.

The transfer of power that we see in the treaty and in the legislation to enact it is entirely consistent, I would argue, with the behaviour of the Government. They have no regard for the standing of Parliament or for our democracy here, and they are transferring the powers of the British people to undemocratic bodies across the sea. In so doing, they are acting exactly the same as when, in the House, they refuse to allow proper debate. That is why we should oppose the motion.

10.52 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): When the Committee's consideration of the Bill was suspended, I was on my feet. When I heard that the Government were rushing through a guillotine motion, I was tempted to ask, "Was it something I said?"

We heard the Foreign Secretary set out rather more substantive reasons for the motion, and I shall confine my remarks to some of the arguments he advanced. The first, and perhaps the most important, argument for any guillotine motion is that the Government have to protect their parliamentary time to ensure the passage of their business. That is a little curious, given the way in which the Government have handled parliamentary time since their election.

If the Government were concerned about parliamentary time, why did they rush forward with an emergency Budget at a time of widespread and well-acknowledged national prosperity, instead of waiting until November? A great deal of parliamentary time was consumed on a Finance Bill much earlier than was necessary. If there was a shortage of parliamentary time, why was the House dismissed at the end of July and not called back until very nearly November? If there is such a shortage of parliamentary time, why is the House to be dismissed before Christmas and brought back not the week after new year, but the following week?

Indeed, if there is such a shortage of parliamentary time—so much so that a Bill of fundamental constitutional significance cannot be properly debated—surely we should look again, at least temporarily, at the Jopling reforms. I speak as someone who supports those reforms. Lord Jopling, as he now is, is my predecessor. Let us consider the sitting hours of the House and invite it to sit on mornings other than Wednesdays and on more Fridays.

If there is really a profound lack of parliamentary time, the Government can easily provide that time through any of the means that I have identified, but the truth is that there is a lack not of time but of Government will to have debate, and that is a very different matter.

The Foreign Secretary advanced the bizarre argument that some of our points were frivolous, citing as an instance of that frivolity and absurdity the proposition from my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary that it is possible for our European partners to misinterpret an agreement, to isolate us 14 to one and to gang up on us.

I know that there is a state of cordial mutual loathing among members of the Cabinet, but I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary ever speaks to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who, at the beginning of the week, said precisely that our partners had misinterpreted and broken an agreement and had ganged up on us 14 to one against our national interest. Perhaps those arguments are not quite so frivolous.

The Foreign Secretary then advanced the mandate argument. That is dangerous territory for him. He said that, because the people had spoken, Conservative Members should not speak; but we have a mandate, too. We were elected to the House on precisely the same basis as Government Members.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Not a lot of you.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Gentleman only ever speaks from a sedentary position. It is very sad that he is not able—or perhaps he is not permitted—to stand up and make a speech. He is a free Member of Parliament, despite what the Whips may tell him. Perhaps he could occasionally contribute from a standing position.

As the hon. Gentleman says that not many of us were elected, let us consider the mandate that the Government secured. They got 42 per cent. of the vote, which is exactly the percentage that I secured in my constituency, so if the Government have a mandate, so do I. On the share of the vote, we did better, even in this dreadful

election year for us, than the Labour party did in 1983. I do not remember the Labour party saying that it had no mandate to speak in Parliament between 1983 and 1987 and would remain silent. The mandate argument does not work.

Mr. Bermingham: I do not know whether the rule of rewriting history now applies, but I seem to remember participating in the 1983 general election, in which we got 200-plus seats—it was a pretty poor year for us—and the Conservative majority was about 144, whereas we now have a majority of goodness knows what, in the region of 170, with about 418 seats. The hon. Gentleman may have been a bit young in those days, but those of us who were around then know that his figures are wrong. Let us face it: one cannot prove anything by twisting statistics to back up a very poor case.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that he has indeed been knocking around for rather longer than I have, but I should point out that our share of the vote in the general election was 31 per cent., while his party's share in 1983 was 28 per cent.

The Foreign Secretary had an even more interesting argument on the mandate. He said that every single person who voted Labour on 1 May knew perfectly well that the Labour party intended to take us into the social chapter on precisely the basis encased in the Bill, with all the consequent implications for the extension of qualified majority voting.

That would have come as a surprise to those who read articles in the *Daily Mail* and other newspapers earlier this year saying that the Prime Minister—then the Leader of the Opposition—would take us in only on the basis that we could pick and choose individual measures entirely on their merits. That is not the basis on which the Bill has been introduced, and that is not the treaty that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary brought back from Amsterdam.

The Foreign Secretary argued that there was simply no alternative to the Bill, and that it was a matter of consistency. He said that because Conservative Members had supported guillotines in the past, it was necessary for us to support them now.

If ever a man was on dangerous territory in making an argument about the virtue of consistency, it is the Foreign Secretary. The right hon. Gentleman used to have a moral objection to nuclear weapons. He now serves as Foreign Secretary in a Government who are deploying Trident. The Foreign Secretary used to have an objection on the ground of sovereignty to the United Kingdom being a member of the European Economic Community. The right hon. Gentleman objected to being in the Common Market. He is now a starry-eyed enthusiast for an ever more federal Europe.

The Foreign Secretary used to believe in mass nationalisation. He now serves in a Government who are carrying out privatisation measures. The right hon. Gentleman cannot argue that the allocation of time motion should be supported on the ground of consistency. He is perhaps one of the most inconsistent politicians that the House has seen for many a long year. His arguments have been dismissed, and so should the motion be.

11 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): On 13 January 1994, an experienced Member stood at the Opposition Dispatch Box and complained that in introducing a timetable motion the then Government showed

"a callous disregard for our democratic procedures".

The hon. Gentleman protested:

"The way in which the Government have tried to force through the business is a contempt of the House."

He added:

"The procedure that we are now discussing is completely unnecessary. We are using time to discuss the guillotine motion that we could have used to discuss aspects of the Bill which are important to hon. Members."

The hon. Gentleman described the then Government's approach as an "affront to democracy". He attacked the Government's conduct, saying that it had

"been wholly reprehensible and unacceptable".—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 384-87.]

That hon. Gentleman was the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), the very person who will respond to the debate on behalf of the Government and force the guillotine on us. On 13 January 1994, the hon. Gentleman was talking about a domestic Bill that could be set aside by later Parliaments; we are talking about an international treaty that cannot be set aside by a subsequent Parliament. What was an "affront to democracy" and a contempt of the House only three years ago is now the very policy that the Minister adopts.

The sad feature is that that background will not trouble the Minister in the slightest—to say one thing one day and do precisely the opposite a little while later. Some might say that such a capacity is a necessary precondition for joining the Government, who are without values and principles.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how he voted on the guillotine motion on 13 January 1994?

Mr. Streeter: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, it is not our case that it is always wrong for a Government to introduce a guillotine motion. However, when a Government are dealing with a constitutional issue they should proceed with the utmost caution. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument.

Some would say that it is a necessary precondition for a Member joining the Government, an Administration without values and principles, to learn quickly to say one thing one day and do the opposite just a while later. Ministers say one thing and do another. Policies that they opposed in opposition are adopted in government. Parliament is treated with that contempt.

We should not even be debating the motion. The Amsterdam treaty is an important constitutional treaty; that is why it has been debated on the Floor of the House. It makes important changes to our relationship with the European Union. It makes changes that cannot easily be undone. As so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, it will give more power to the European Parliament.

[Mr. Streeter]

It provides for an extension of qualified majority voting. It includes the social chapter and a new employment chapter, which will impose new regulations on British people. It makes new arrangements for border controls and moves us closer to an integrated foreign and security policy. It changes the law on subsidiarity and it gives more power to Presidents of the Commission. All those things, and many more besides, are surely worth more than a cursory glance from the House. We are, after all, elected as a check on the Executive.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I wish to apologise to the shadow Foreign Secretary, to whom I inaccurately attributed a reference to the position of the high representative, as covered by one of the articles of the Amsterdam treaty. I was wrong to do so and I have apologised to him informally; it is only right that I should put the record straight formally.

The hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) has given an eloquent, in his terms, justification for his opposition to the guillotine on the Bill on the ground that it raises constitutional issues. Did not the Single European Act raise the same constitutional issues?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. and learned Gentleman apologises in his usual gracious way. He makes an important point, but there are at least two features that distinguish this measure from the Single European Act.

After all that I have said about the importance of the Bill, after only three days the Government have tabled a guillotine motion. It was not even three full days. The first day's debate started not at 3.30 pm but at 5.55 pm; the second at 5.30 pm; the third at 5.50 pm. On each day, at least two hours of debate was lost to Government statements. What should have been 18 hours of debates became 12. We have not had three days but a mere 12 hours.

On each day, the Government did not move a 10 o'clock motion. They did not even table one on any of those days, so cynical and predetermined was their desire to stifle debate. They did not bother because they knew that they would not use it. We had late starts and early endings, a truncated debate from day one. We are driven to the clear conclusion that the Government never wanted a proper examination of the treaty that they brought back from Amsterdam. There are two obvious reasons for that. First, they know that they failed at Amsterdam. They gave away far too many concessions with absolutely nothing in return.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): Will the hon. Gentleman not be as generous as some Conservative Members and at least acknowledge that after I had listened to the debate on the first set of amendments for a day and a half, I spent nearly an hour thoroughly covering the points that had been raised? I resent any suggestion that I have not taken the Bill or the scrutiny of the House seriously.

Mr. Streeter: The Minister makes my point for me. Substantial points were raised to which he needed an hour to respond. It was not filibustering. They were not frivolous points. If they had been, he would not have bothered to reply. He took an hour to reply to a substantive debate.

The Prime Minister told the House on Monday that every country fights for its own interests at European summits. What a pity he did not realise that in June when he went to Amsterdam. No wonder he was more popular at Amsterdam than at Luxembourg. The Government want to stifle democratic debate and proper scrutiny of Bill to cover up their failings at the negotiating table. It is a cynical cover-up from a Government without values or principles.

The second reason why the Government want to curtail debate is because they treat Parliament with contempt. From the moment that they were elected, they have used every trick in the book to avoid debate and bypass scrutiny. The mother of Parliaments has been shuffled off to a retirement home. After a paltry 12 hours of debate, a major constitutional issue has been given the chop.

Throughout their remarks, Labour Members have suggested that Conservative Members have tried to filibuster the debate. Even a brief glance at *Hansard* confirms that nothing could be further from the truth. In the first three days, only 10 hon. Members spoke for more than 20 minutes: five Conservative Members and five Labour Members, including the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) who spoke for 30 minutes, though I still do not know what he said.

The Minister took nearly an hour to reply to the first debate, although we do not criticise him for that. It is clear from what I have said that no filibustering has taken place. We have been restrained in the number of amendments that we have tabled. The average length of a Back-Bench contribution in the three days of debate has been 14 minutes. No wrecking tactics have been deployed or points of order raised. We have had a constructive and important debate throughout.

Real progress has been made. We have finished consideration of the first three groups of amendments, and consideration of the fourth group is well under way. The time taken to discuss those amendments averages three hours of debate per group of amendments, which is a reasonable rate of progress on a major constitutional Bill.

Because of the guillotine motion, debate on all the remaining amendments and new clauses will be squeezed into two days—on the Government's record that will become two half-days. We will not be able to scrutinise the Bill and debate the amendments properly. That means that we will be unable to examine fully the extra powers given to the President of the Commission to veto our nominee as Commissioner, which is an important point. We will not be able scrutinise in detail the implications of the new provisions in the treaty that state that all Commissioners must act under the political guidance of the President of the Commission. In effect, that makes those Commissioners members of a European Cabinet.

We will not have time to study properly the extra powers given to Europol. We will be unable to do justice to the new provisions on subsidiarity and proportionality. We will have precious little time to probe the Government again about their disgraceful blunder on the border controls opt-in. There will no real opportunity to consider the extensions of power of the European Court of Justice and its complete lack of reform. We will not have time to discuss the cost to our taxpayers of the inclusion, for the first time in a treaty, of the fact that the European Parliament will be permanently located in both Brussels and Strasbourg.

Those are all important matters, but the truth is that, thanks to the motion, we will not have time to discuss them properly. The Government have cited the Single European Act as a precedent for guillotining a constitutional measure after three days of debate. Well, they are wrong on two counts. In 1986, the debates were much longer each day, so that in three days nearly 20 hours of debate took place, not 12 hours as in this case. Secondly, in 1986, virtually no progress was made in those first three days. Many points of order were raised at the start of each sitting and there was ample evidence of delaying tactics.

We have made real progress on this Bill, and we are now discussing the fourth group of amendments. There is no justification for citing the Single European Act as a precedent. To spare the Foreign Secretary's blushes, although I suspect that he does not blush easily, I point out only in passing that he voted against the guillotine motion in 1986. It was wrong then, but apparently it is right now. That is hardly a basis for using that legislation as a precedent for the motion.

If we take all those matters together, it is clear that the timetable motion is the act of an arrogant Government, who ride roughshod over Parliament. It is the action of a Government prepared to unstitch our constitution without considering the long-term implications.

We all know that there is a nasty authoritarian streak in the Government. When their Members of the European Parliament speak out, they gag them. When their own Back Benchers get into difficulty, they ditch them. When Labour Members, on the Government's own Benches, vote with their conscience, they are reprimanded. The Government see their Back Benchers as mere cannon fodder, part of a factory farm production line. Under new Labour, only the spin doctors are free range.

It is a Government who think that nanny knows best, but it is the only nanny I know who hates her own children. I have no doubt that they will get their way tonight. They have such a large majority they can do what they like. It would be nice if the Liberal Democrats and Members of the other minor parties joined us in the Lobby. I should have thought that the Liberal Democrats were becoming ever more fearful of the Government's desire to control and bully, but I see that they have sold out to their coalition partners. Now we know what constructive opposition means: they do what they are told by the Minister without Portfolio.

The Minister of State is an honourable man. I do not want to ruin his career, but I want to say this to him: I like him. I shall not scream hysterically at him, but simply tell him that what he is doing tonight is wrong, and he knows it.

We have been conducting a constructive and positive scrutiny of a major treaty. It has had just 12 hours' debate, and in bringing down the guillotine so prematurely and unnecessarily, the Minister is sending a clear signal to the nation: the Government will stop at nothing to get their own way. Lone parents, the disabled, their own Back Benchers; the Government will trample over them all if it suits their wider political purposes, whatever they are.

What the Government are doing is wrong, and we shall oppose it.

11.15 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): The Government have been accused of having an authoritarian streak. I know that the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) was not referring to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—although he could perhaps have been referring to my past. My answer to him is that the Government will have a majority tonight not because of an authoritarian streak but because we have a majority of the Members of the House, and because the majority of the British people want a Labour Government, and what that means for their life style.

My right hon. Friend said earlier that he looked forward to hearing "virtuous indignation" from the Conservatives. He has not been disappointed. We have heard the same empty arguments, the same double standards and the same Second Reading speeches as we have already heard in Committee, as well as on the original Second Reading.

The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made a telling point when he said that everything had been said, but everyone had not yet said it. That was so true of the Committee stage, and he has been right again about the contributions that we have heard tonight.

Like me, the hon. and learned Member knows that if there were no guillotine motion, the Bill would be sent into a siding because of the behaviour of Conservative Members. Those on the Opposition Front Bench may or may not believe that it would be in their interests to send the Bill into a siding. They may judge that the British people might misinterpret their motives were they to do that, when the present Government have achieved in the treaty aims that the previous Government wanted, but failed, to achieve.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: Not just now.

However, even if that were the judgment of the main Opposition spokesmen, they would not be able to deliver it to the House because they have no control over the hon. Members who sit behind them. I see the shadow Foreign Secretary smiling, and he has obviously acknowledged the point.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Henderson: There have been double standards throughout the debate.

Mr. Blunt: How can the hon. Gentleman reconcile the fact that he is speaking to a guillotine motion with the following:

"DESIRING . . . to encourage greater involvement of national parliaments in the activities of the European Union and to enhance their ability to express their views on matters which may be of particular interest to them"?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman raises the point, but—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The Government and the Labour party believe in parliamentary democracy,

[Mr. Henderson]

but we will not have it obstructed by a few obstructive individuals on the Opposition Benches who are not prepared to accept the importance and relevance of the treaty of Amsterdam to the people of Britain.

As for double standards, I thought that the hon. Member for South-West Devon was a bit stupid to talk about my opposition to a guillotine in 1994, because at that time he opposed my position, and voted for the guillotine.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) and I sat opposite each other many times during the last Parliament when we were dealing with home affairs. It is a bit rich for him to argue against a guillotine on the Amsterdam treaty, when he supported the 82 guillotine motions that the Conservative Government introduced during that Parliament.

Mr. Howard: Eighty five.

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that there were 85. In the Parliament before that, he imposed a guillotine on the poll tax legislation. I served on the Committee considering water privatisation, which was also guillotined. It is again a bit rich for him to say that we should not vote for a guillotine on the treaty of Amsterdam, when he voted for a guillotine on the Single European Act in 1986. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said that that was a far more damning guillotine motion than the one before us.

If the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen had come to me to discuss a timetable for the Bill, we would have had ample time to debate the various aspects. I consider that the three days in Committee that we have already had, plus the prospect of a further two days, is a reasonable amount of time.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: No, I shall not give way.

Five days in Committee plus one day on Second Reading is a reasonable time to dispose of the issues involved in the Bill.

Mr. Howard: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Opposition made such an offer on the Government of Wales Bill, but the Government rejected it out of hand?

When will the Minister answer the question that I posed to the Foreign Secretary? Will he identify one of the three criteria that, according to the Home Secretary, must be satisfied before a guillotine can be justified? I did not oppose the motion on the basis that we can never have a guillotine: I said that it must be justified on one of the three criteria. Which of those criteria is relevant to this guillotine motion?

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows of my close association with the Home Secretary, and I can tell him that all the Home Secretary's criteria apply to the Bill. The House must deal with this legislation. The right hon. and learned Gentleman, his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench and the more experienced Conservative Members behind him know that if there were no guillotine, there would be no prospect of the Bill seeing the light of day in any reasonable time.

This is an important issue, and we must try to allow the right amount of time to debate it. I am sympathetic to timetabling motions. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know from my days in opposition that I was prepared to reach agreement on a timetable to allow practical discussion of the issues involved. The Conservative Government knew that if they had a deal with us on the timetabling of legislation, that deal stuck, because we were a united Opposition. The problem for the present Opposition is that even if they wanted to deliver a deal, they could not do so, because they cannot deliver the votes of Conservative Members.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, this is an important Bill, because it provides real benefits for the people of this country. The treaty gives, for the first time, explicit legal authority for Britain to retain its border controls; it confirms NATO as the cornerstone of our defence; it provides a fuller, legally binding basis for the principle of subsidiarity; it provides for tougher action on fraud against the Community budget; and it obliges the European Union to give greater priority to protecting the environment, promoting openness in its proceedings, and to tackling unemployment. I say again to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it also extends to an issue that was well debated before the general election and on which the Government have an explicit mandate from the electorate—the social chapter, which extends to workers in this country the same rights as workers in other parts of Europe.

As was made clear on Second Reading, the Bill has the support of the House. The Government have a mandate for their programme. We have a duty to put into effect our legislative proposals and to make sure that the legislation and other measures are not frustrated by a small number of Opposition Members. We shall make sure that we exercise that responsibility, and we ask the House to support the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 352, Noes 144.

Division No. 123] **[11.25 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen

Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Ptaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve

White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arness, David
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. John Whittingdale.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill:—

Committee of the whole House

1.—(1) The remaining proceedings in Committee shall be completed in two allotted days.

(2) At the sitting on the first allotted day, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected and

(b) which would insert after '9' at line 13 of page 1 of the Bill words relating to paragraph 40 of Article 2 of the Treaty,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Seven o'clock.

(3) At the sitting on that day proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would insert at the end of line 13 of page 1 of the Bill words relating to Article 2(3)(b) of the Treaty,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Nine o'clock.

(4) At the sitting on the second allotted day, any remaining proceedings on Clauses 1 and 2 shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Six o'clock.

(5) At that sitting, the remaining proceedings in Committee shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Eight o'clock.

Proceedings on going into Committee

2. When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith whether or not notice of an instruction to the Committee has been given; and Standing Order No. 66 (Committee of the whole House on bill) shall not apply.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

3. On the conclusion of the proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and, if he reports the Bill with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

Report and Third Reading

4. The proceedings on Consideration and on Third Reading shall be completed on the second allotted day and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Conclusion of proceedings

5.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraphs 1 or 4, the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion before that time; and

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion,

and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion; and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted Business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Order of proceedings

6. No motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Interruption of business

8. The following business shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour—

(a) proceedings under paragraph 5(1);

(b) proceedings to which paragraph 5(2) or (3) applies;

(c) proceedings under paragraph 10(1).

Business Committee

9. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Supplemental orders

10.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) If at the sitting on an allotted day the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraphs 1 or 4, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Recommittal

11. No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise) and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

12. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day;

"the Treaty" means the Treaty signed at Amsterdam on 2nd October 1997 amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts.

STANDING ORDERS (ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT)

Resolved,

That Standing Order No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee) be amended in line 9 by leaving out the word 'fifteen' and inserting the word 'sixteen'.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

EU-Israel Association Agreement

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

11.38 pm

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): The trigger for this debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Lady is addressing the House. Will hon. Members please leave quietly?

Dr. Starkey: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The trigger for this debate is the revelation earlier this year that Israel was effectively fiddling the books and attempting to subvert the interim trade agreement with the European Union by passing off as "made in Israel" goods that have been manufactured elsewhere. Under the terms of the agreement, Israel has a quota for goods—including orange juice, which is allowed into the EU at zero tariff—and 70 per cent. of the normal tariff is charged on additional imports beyond the quota.

It emerged that Brazilian orange juice had been imported into Israel, relabelled as "made in Israel" and exported to the EU at zero tariff. The presumption is that Israel wished to maintain its quota for future use, while choosing to sell its orange juice more profitably elsewhere. Whatever the reason, that is clearly a deliberate defrauding of the EU. It would be helpful if the Minister could estimate the loss to the EU in duties forgone.

The EU had had suspicions that goods from Israel had been mislabelled and it therefore took a serious view of the latest infringement. Detailed investigations uncovered further abuses. Orange juice from illegal settlements in Gaza had been similarly mislabelled. On 8 November, the EU issued a warning. Part of it says:

"The specific situation is aggravated by the fact that since the inquiry got under way, various elements have come to light which confirm a lack of effective administrative cooperation, as foreseen in the different preferential agreements signed between the Community and Israel, and in particular certain substantial errors in the application of those same agreements, to the extent that the validity of all preferential certificates issued by Israel, for all products, are put in doubt."

As a result, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has been carrying out investigations into the true origin of a wide range of Israeli exports to the United Kingdom—including, for example, textile waste and telecommunications equipment.

Interestingly, today I have received an answer from the Treasury showing that further inquiries by Customs and Excise

"relating to a range of manufactured goods have been suspended following undertakings given by Israel at a meeting with EC officials on 28 November".

I should like the Minister to clarify what those undertakings can possibly be, given Israel's misleading behaviour until now.

In previous discussions in the House on the interim trade agreement with Israel, hon. Members have repeatedly raised concerns about similar false origination certificates relating to Israeli products—in particular, goods from illegal settlements in the occupied territories being passed off as Israeli goods. In 1989, the then Foreign Office Minister reassured my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short), now Secretary of State for International Development, that there were no arrangements for produce originating from Israeli settlements in the occupied territories to enjoy preferential access to the British market.

In the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, which examined the interim agreement in February 1997, the former Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale, Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd, and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) restated their concern about false description and again were reassured by the Minister. It is now clear that those suspicions were justified and that the reassurances have not been borne out.

On 28 November, in response to the latest dispute between the EU and Israel, the Israeli trade and industry minister, Natan Sharansky, admitted in the Israeli press that there had been past transgressions, but attempted in effect to buy off the EU by allowing it additional checks within Israel. That is the clearest possible evidence that the Israelis are playing fast and loose with the EU.

Perhaps I may digress slightly, as we need to understand the EU's purpose in negotiating association agreements. The association agreement with Israel is one of a series of Euro-Med agreements intended to strengthen economic links with the region. There is a similar agreement with the Palestinian National Authority. The interim agreement on trade and trade-related matters deals essentially with the trade provisions of a full association agreement, pending full ratification of that full agreement.

Access to European Union markets is a privilege given in return for Israel and the Palestinian National Authority participating positively in the middle east peace process. Again, the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office made that clear in February 1997 when he said:

"Support for the middle east peace process is the cornerstone of United Kingdom and European Union policy in the region . . . Liberalisation of trade will contribute to prosperity and thus to regional stability . . . The EU's agreement with Israel and the PLO will help to increase prosperity in the region."—[*Official Report, Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation,* 19 February 1997; c. 4.]

In recognition of the linkage of trade preferences to progress in the middle east peace process, two specific articles—1 and 38—were included in the interim association. Article 1 obligates Israel and the European Union to respect human rights and democratic principles. Article 38 obliges Israel to refrain from representing products of its illegal settlements in the occupied territories as originating in Israel or, indeed, certifying Palestinian products exported by Israeli firms as products of Israel.

There have been numerous examples of breaches of article 1, which deals with human rights and democratic principles. There have been collective punishments of the Palestinian population in response to individual acts by Palestinians. There have been repeated land confiscations, denial of access to Jerusalem for most Palestinians, and a system of internal controls for Palestinians akin to the pass controls of apartheid in South Africa. Some people's Jerusalem ID has been cancelled so that they can no longer live in Jerusalem.

It is now clear that article 38 has also been regularly breached. In effect, Israel is pretending to participate in the peace process. It is blocking progress and failing to implement agreements already made, but it is preventing the outright collapse of discussions. At the same time, it is continuing to build illegal settlements in the occupied territories, often based on export-oriented agricultural enterprises, and using those settlements to cement its territorial expansion.

The other half of Israeli policy is to choke the growth of the nascent Palestinian economy through internal and external closures. Since the Oslo accords, there have effectively been closures on one day out of three. These closures are paralysing Palestinian trade and have led to the direct loss of at least 100,000 jobs. The United Nations special co-ordinator's office for the occupied territories has estimated that real wage levels in the area controlled by the Palestinian National Authority fell by about 20 per cent. in 1996 and that the real per capita gross national product had fallen by 38.8 per cent. since 1992.

When I was in the middle east in the summer, I saw and heard for myself the effect of that policy. In Gaza, for instance, tomatoes produced there were rotting during the closures because they could not be exported to the rest of the Palestinian National Authority controlled area. Meanwhile, people living in Ramallah were being forced to pay 70 times more than market rates to get hold of tomatoes.

In addition, the Israelis were operating punitive controls on goods from Gaza to Egypt on spurious security grounds. I say "spurious" because the goods were not transiting through Israel but were going direct from Gaza to Egypt. There were reports of boxes of carnations being pierced with check rods, supposedly to check whether there were weapons inside. Of course, that damaged the carnations and made them wholly unsaleable. While such punitive controls are operating, Palestinian goods supplied to Israeli marketing firms are strangely exempted from such treatment.

The economic agreement that the European Union has made with Israel, which should be bolstering peace, is undercutting it. By providing markets for products from illegal settlements, we and the rest of the European Union are positively encouraging the development and sustaining of those settlements—settlements that are sabotaging the peace process not only for the present Israeli Government but for future Israeli Governments. The Israelis are being allowed to enjoy the economic dividend without making any progress on peace. The current Israeli Government have retreated on progress, and the Palestinians are paying—in unemployment, in business bankruptcies and in land confiscations.

The further irony is that the European Union taxpayer is also paying the price, because donor aid from the European Union, which should be supporting economic development in the Palestinian National Authority area, is paying to offset the economic damage of the Israeli blockade on the Palestinian economy.

The Israelis' response to being found out defrauding the European Union has been to bluster and challenge the definition of the geographical area to which the agreement applies. On 10 December 1997, *Ha'aretz* said:

"Israel's representative to the European Union in Brussels, Ephraim Halevy, emphasised that . . . the subject of territoriality with respect to the rules of origin is a political question and that Israel strongly objects to its inclusion in its discussions with the Union, 'because it's not the European Union who is going to determine the borders of Israel as an incidental by-product of economic discussions.'"

We must say that that is not acceptable. The European Union has made it clear throughout that the agreement applies only to the internationally recognised borders of Israel.

The UK position was reiterated, in March 1997, by Jeremy Hanley, then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a letter to the former Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale. He wrote:

"The British Government's position on Jerusalem is well known, and is shared by all our EU partners . . . we do not recognise Israeli (de jure) sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem. It follows that goods produced in Jerusalem are not the produce of Israel . . . A similar logic would apply to goods produced in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories".

The European Union simply cannot allow Israel unilaterally to reinterpret the terms of an agreement with the European Union. Moreover, that agreement is a privilege, not a right, and gives an advantage to Israel in return for co-operation in the peace process—a process which Israel seems to have no intention of delivering. If the European taxpayer is not to continue to be taken for a ride, the British Government and the European Union will have to take a firm stand.

The agreement has not yet been ratified, and I should be grateful if the Minister will indicate when it is due to be ratified. I very much hope that he will make it clear that the EU-Israel association agreement cannot be finally approved by the Council of Ministers until cast-iron guarantees are given that Israel will comply with the European Union's interpretation of article 38 and with the definition of what constitutes the state of Israel.

The European Union has to spell out the fact that international law—not the force of conquest—decides what is occupied and what is not, and that Israel must comply with international law and provide absolutely watertight guarantees that only goods made within the internationally agreed borders of Israel will be able to enjoy the privileges that the European Union is prepared to give.

11.53 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) on raising these issues, and on the way in which she presented her case. Although the House's attendance is somewhat limited at this late hour, I have no doubt that every hon. Member in the Chamber has been impressed with the way in which she has expressed and dealt with some extremely detailed and important issues. I therefore congratulate her doubly on her speech.

I shall make a few opening comments about the nature of the association agreement and the processes that relate to my hon. Friend's final point. I shall then attempt to deal with some of the technical issues relating to countries of origin before moving onto the peace process and Britain's presidency of the European Union. I hope to do all that in the few minutes that I have to speak.

The EU-Israel association agreement was signed in November 1995. It was ratified by Israel and most EU member states early in the process. The United

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

Kingdom completed its ratification on 8 April this year, after the debate in Committee on 19 February to which my hon. Friend referred.

My hon. Friend was absolutely right to draw attention to one extremely important point: the reason why virtually all right hon. and hon. Members considered it sensible for the United Kingdom to ratify the agreement was that there had been progress in relation to Hebron. As a result, all parties were agreed that the House should give the association agreement a fair wind. My hon. Friend was right to say that, at the time, our attitude to ratification was coloured by our attitude to the progress in the middle east peace process.

My hon. Friend may be interested to know that two EU member states—France and Belgium—have not completed their domestic processes of ratification. We expect both countries to have done so in the first half of 1998, although the procedures relate to parliamentary processes in those countries. It is possible that the processes will not have been completed during the United Kingdom presidency, but that depends on the two countries concerned.

My hon. Friend then asked about the attitude of the Council of Ministers to the association agreement and its final ratification. Progress on the middle east peace process would certainly help discussions in the Council of Ministers. It would greatly improve the atmosphere and prove beneficial to Israel.

It may be useful if, before turning to the technical issues, I set out the Government's views on where we are on the peace process, and how we would like it to progress. My hon. Friend is right to say that, post-Oslo, the Palestinians have gained little economic reward from the peace process—indeed, quite the opposite. The figure she quoted in terms of the reduction in living standards for Palestinians may be conservative. Some would suggest that the figure may be as high as 40 per cent.

I realise that political and economic processes do not work together in a simple causal relationship, but if we are to show that peace works, we also have to show that it produces economic rewards. It is abundantly clear that the Palestinians should have more than their fair share of those rewards, simply because of their circumstances and the differential in incomes in the middle east.

My hon. Friend was also right to say that the process is currently stalled. We have taken an active role in trying to encourage the restart of the process. Earlier this year, we were concerned when it appeared that the peace process was no longer engaged, and there was no prospect of progress. We have encouraged the United States to become actively involved and we very much welcome the steps that Secretary of State Albright has taken to try to bring the parties together and get the process going.

It is always worth reminding ourselves that the peace process is the only show in town—the only way in which we shall make progress, and the only way in which Israelis, Palestinians and others in the region will have the opportunity to live together in peace, security and justice. The peace process is important to us all, regardless of the way in which we approach the issues, and from whatever standpoint we come.

We have been pressing the Israeli Government to ensure that the offer on the table will re-create some confidence in the peace process. We have suggested the need for progress and action in the following areas. We believe that there is a need for what Secretary of State Albright has called "time out", and that no action should be taken that determines or predetermines the final status negotiations.

Our view on settlements comes into that process. We are clear that the settlements are illegal, and are an attempt to pre-empt final status negotiations. We have also said that there should be further substantial redeployment. The figures will be subject to negotiation, but the redeployment must be real, qualitative and quantitative. It has to ensure that it rebuilds confidence in the process.

We also believe that there need to be further confidence-building measures, and we have constantly drawn attention to the need to make progress on the proposals for the airport and the port—both of which will feed strongly into the economic issues to which my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West referred. We also believe that there is a need to ensure free and safe passage so that the situations that my hon. Friend described do not happen and the peace process and the political and economic issues are not undermined. We have made it clear to the Israeli Government that there should not be action that squeezes the Palestinians and their civic society out of Jerusalem, because that would also pre-empt the final status negotiations.

We have made that position clear. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister delivered that message to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and it has been delivered by other European Union leaders. We hope to see progress in the current round of negotiations.

As I am sure some of my hon. Friends will know, President Arafat is in London tomorrow. We hope that he will be engaging in a successful negotiation through Secretary of State Albright, and that we will be able to make the progress to which I referred. It is important—we recognise this—that, in the context of the peace process, there is a commitment to security on both sides. We need peace; we need security. Both sides have obligations. We are stressing the need for those obligations to be carried out.

The United Kingdom will assume the European Union presidency within two weeks. We are determined to be active in that presidency in our role in the middle east. We feel that we can play an important part by ensuring that the European voice is heard and that our aspirations and concerns are expressed in the peace process.

We are also determined to act as complementary support and help to the United States in the peace process, because—I repeat the point that I made earlier—we all have a reason to ensure that the process is successful. Over the next six months of our presidency, we are determined to play an active and constructive role. Hopefully, we can move on some of the peace-related issues, so that we can move towards the justice with peace and security to which my hon. Friend referred.

I should like to take this opportunity to deal with some of the more detailed issues to which my hon. Friend rightly referred. She talked about the question of orange juice and Israel's breach of country-of-origin rules. I reassure her that the Council of Ministers is very aware of the issue, very concerned about it, and wants appropriate action to be taken. It is clearly unacceptable that Israel—or any country—is in breach of an agreement with the European Union.

It is clear from the available evidence that there has been a breach, and that action needs to be taken. The Commission is following up the matter with Israel, and we hope that they will reach a proper solution in the near future. That solution must be a recognition that "country of origin" means exactly that, and that the rules are clear and cannot be bent. The rules must be honoured, because they are part of an agreement between Israel and the European Union.

My hon. Friend also asked whether it was possible for Israel to redefine its borders under international law, as part of the EU association agreement. I hope that I made the point earlier that our position on that is clear—indeed, it was shared by the previous Government—and we regard the settlements as illegal.

The final boundaries and the final status issues have to be negotiated between the parties, but we do not recognise the settlements under international law, and we have said so on many occasions. The trade association agreement cannot redefine Israel's boundaries, and all the issues must be resolved through the final status negotiations. The position is clear under international law, to us and to other countries, and we will continue to restate our position on the settlements as part of the overall process.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the importance of human rights as part of the broader association agreement. Whenever I visit any country in the middle east, or in any other part of the world, I take the opportunity to raise human rights issues. Human rights are universal: they are not a la carte, and we cannot choose which countries we want to enforce human rights. We must consider each and every country in relation to a universal respect for human rights. That is true for Israel, for the Palestine National Authority and for other countries. I can give my hon. Friend the clear reassurance that we will continue to raise human rights issues on every visit to the region.

My hon. Friend rightly raised specific issues, but the important issue for us all is to make progress in the middle east peace process. I do not believe that any hon. Member, from either side of the House, wishes to see the process stalled, because, if that happens, the risks are obvious and substantial. We all know that we face a difficult and delicate situation. My plea to all those involved is to make progress, through any necessary concessions, and to recognise the needs of all the parties directly involved in the negotiation. No one can seek to stop the world, get off and freeze the process, because that will not work.

We need to negotiate on the basis that the way to bring a lasting peace to the middle east is to recognise the genuine needs of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. If we can do that, the prize is substantial. It is a sad reflection that a region so rich in people and natural resources, and with a culture that is so diverse and yet so important to the history of the world, under-performs both economically and politically.

If we can get the peace right, the middle east can move forward. If we can play a part in that process in the next six months, during our presidency of the European Union, we will make a real and lasting contribution. We all wish to make progress, and to see peace, justice and security in that region.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The President of the Board of Trade was asked—

Export Market (Competitiveness)

1. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** What priority her Department attaches to improving the competitiveness of British industry in respect of the export market. [19867]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): We attach high priority to strengthening support for British industry in overseas markets. One of our first actions in government was to set up the export forum in partnership with the private sector. The Department is now giving attention to its detailed recommendations.

Mr. Thomas: I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments. Her efforts and those of her Department to promote British industry abroad will be much welcomed by exporters in my constituency. Can she tell us when her Department will act on the export forum's report?

Mrs. Beckett: One of the first things that we did was to reinstate the trade fairs support scheme, which was widely welcomed by industry, especially exporters. We have now announced the first part of the largest ever programme of trade fairs and missions. That first part alone will support 372 groups at trade fairs, 159 trade missions and 32 overseas seminars. Of course, all my Ministers are involved in supporting the export drive with a programme of visits to overseas markets.

We are also working to step up the successful programme of export promotions. Last night at Lancaster house I hosted a reception for current and, we hope, prospective export promoters, and we are working to consider the recommendations of the export forum on how we can organise our support for exports even better across Departments.

Mr. Beggs: Does the President of the Board of Trade agree that a company's ability to deliver speedily high-value goods to its international customers increases its competitiveness in the marketplace? Will she enter into discussions with those who provide air freight services, to advise them that regular competitively priced services would greatly assist British industry with exports?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and am certainly mindful that that is one of the pieces of advice that we often received from British business before the election. Part of people's concern was that we should have a proper, soundly working transport infrastructure, so that they could get their goods to market. I certainly bear in mind the point that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Mr. Redwood: May I wish the right hon. Lady and her Front-Bench team every compliment of the Christmas season and hope that they have a happy and enjoyable Christmas break with their families? Now, given that industry needs fair and firm enforcement of the rules to be able to compete, will she tell us why she has granted an extension to the *New Statesman*, a Labour publication connected with the Paymaster General, for late filing of accounts? What action does she propose to take on the continued failure to file? Will the United Kingdom tax authorities co-operate with the Belgian tax authorities in the investigation into the affairs connected with the estate of Madame Bourgeois? We need fair and firm enforcement of the rules, whoever may be involved with the businesses.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his Christmas wishes, which I return—although I had a feeling that there would be a "but" following them, as turned out to be the case. The issues that he raises concerning the personal affairs of my hon. Friend the Paymaster General have been extensively discussed in the House.

Mr. Bercow: The *New Statesman*?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman raised that as well. The hon. Gentleman should have been listening to his right hon. Friend. The House has dealt with the issues extensively and there is nothing to add.

As for the *New Statesman*, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is aware, it is not a part of my daily duties to consider personally the handling of the accounts of individual companies. I will make inquiries about the matter, but it is not one with which I am familiar.

High Technology Companies

2. **Dr. Iddon:** What action her Department is taking to encourage financial institutions to invest in high-technology companies. [19868]

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Government believe that high-technology, growth firms are one of the keys to building a successful modern economy. The Department of Trade and Industry has frequent contact with financial institutions and their representative bodies to discuss the financing of growth companies and to ensure that Government policies encourage such investment. The DTI is also supporting a number of general and sectoral initiatives that will help emerging growth companies to access appropriate packages of private sector finance.

Dr. Iddon: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and also for the fact that this Government have clearly shown that they are committed to the promotion of high technology. Does my hon. Friend welcome the recent formation of the McCullagh group, which will bring

high-technology companies much closer together with the financial institutions that have the money to invest in their work?

Mrs. Roche: Yes, I certainly do. The new Government very much bear in mind the excellent reports produced by the Confederation of British Industry and the Bank of England in that area. I was anxious that we should take quick action, which is why I am delighted to tell the House that we have formed the tech-stars steering group as well, to work alongside the other group, so that we can help that vibrant sector, which has the ability to win for Britain. I am also delighted to be able to say that the first meeting, which I attended, has taken place.

Mr. Jenkin: How does it encourage financial institutions to invest in high-technology companies if their dividends are taxed by the abolition of tax credits?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman must really think of some better points—*[Interruption.]* I know that Opposition Members are a little restive to get up for Christmas, but the House still has some serious work to do. What is important is to ensure that we have stability over the long term and a strategy that is geared to long-term investment. That is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is about and that is why British business has so warmly welcomed all the measures that he has taken.

Low Pay Commission

3. **Mr. MacShane:** If she will make a statement on the work of the Low Pay Commission, with special reference to Yorkshire. [19870]

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): The Low Pay Commission is undertaking a series of regional visits and will take evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals on the national minimum wage. I understand that the commission made a successful visit to Yorkshire on 5 December and took evidence from employers, employee organisations, representatives of the Low Pay Unit and the voluntary sector.

Mr. MacShane: Now that the shadow President of the Board of Trade has been forced to boot out his deputy, once he was exposed this week as being up to his ears in low-pay, sweatshop employers, can my hon. Friend confirm that in my constituency of Rotherham a survey this week showed that a huge number of employers still pay less than £3 an hour? Those are exactly the sort of exploitative, sweatshop, third-world employers Tory Members support and have direct financial interests in.

Mr. McCartney: I can confirm that 4,000 families in Rotherham receive family credit because the pay that they receive at the end of the week is not sufficient for them to live on. As for the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), who threatened that I would not be in this job too long, I think that he has left his post rather more quickly than I am going to do. Perhaps when the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who has replaced him, comes to the Dispatch Box, he will give us some indications about his farming holdings and how those relate to the National Minimum Wage Bill, in particular clauses 43 and 44 and schedule 2, which all deal with the Agricultural Wages Act 1948.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) had responsibility for shadowing energy policy, and that is precisely why he has gone to join the man who decides on energy policy—the Paymaster General—at the Treasury.

On a more serious note, will the Minister confirm whether every single low-paid or disabled person in Yorkshire will be paid the minimum wage in full?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks was caught out with a vengeance on Tuesday evening, when trying to defend sweatshop labour. On numerous occasions he was given the opportunity to declare an interest to the House and failed to do so. Even worse, he dismissed the points that were made. As a consequence, he has been moved quickly, because he could not deal with matters relating to the National Minimum Wage Bill. I repeat the question: when the hon. Member for Daventry comes to the Dispatch Box, will he please advise the House how he will be able to manage the issues, given the potential conflict of interest?

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) knows full well that the Low Pay Commission has responsibility to come up with a starting rate for the national minimum wage. We have made it absolutely clear from the outset that there will be no discrimination against people with disabilities who want to claim the national minimum wage.

Economic and Monetary Union

4. **Mr. Wyatt:** What is the role of her Department in assisting British business to prepare for EMU. [19871]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department has been helping to prepare British business by working closely with the Treasury, both on the committees set up to prepare for economic and monetary union and in helping to produce its booklet, "Practical Information for Business". The Department will also be providing staff for the new euro preparations unit.

Mr. Wyatt: I thank my right hon. Friend. Businesses in my constituency want to join EMU tomorrow, and if not tomorrow, the day after; but the major concern, especially among small and medium enterprises, is how we can help them to understand better the implications of EMU.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right: it is a consequence of the previous Government's neglect of the issue that so many people in the business community, and especially in small and medium businesses, have not had the information. The Treasury has produced the "Practical Information for Business" booklet, 50,000 copies of which have already been distributed; that is a clear indication of the interest in the matter. The Bank of England, the Confederation of British Industry and the British chambers of commerce are all working on co-operative programmes to spread the information that business needs.

My hon. Friend is entirely right to identify the fact that whatever happens in terms of British participation in economic and monetary union, British business will be affected by its introduction.

Mr. Redwood: In view of previous questions put to us by Ministers, we would be very happy to answer questions for the Department of Trade and Industry in Government time, as that might be more enlightening than some of the answers that we get from them. In the meantime, we are asking the questions.

Given that a single currency would mean that interest and exchange rates, public borrowing, our overdrafts and savings, and our economic policy would be settled by an offshore bureaucracy rather than by our democracy, what caused the President of the Board of Trade to change her mind from her principled opposition to the European Community and all its works, for which she was famous, to strong support for full economic and monetary union?

Mr. Skinner: You did the opposite. You are a Johnny-come-lately.

Mrs. Beckett: I rather share my hon. Friend's view. I recall very recently sitting at dinner next to someone who said that he had been a Euro-sceptic since 1992, to which my response was, "Too late." What changed my mind was 25 years, two referendums and the experience of the British people, who clearly chose, by a democratic decision, to remain in the European Union. In my view it is now the case that all our interests are irrevocably bound up with our membership of that body, and it is absolutely essential for Britain's future to make the best that we can of our membership and to work co-operatively with our European Union partners.

The classic example of that is economic and monetary union itself. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting, as he seemed to imply, that the Conservative party has now decided that it does not want to participate in economic and monetary union at any point, but I can tell him that that would be disastrous for British business and for our economy.

Dr. Palmer: In view of the welcome interest shown by Opposition Front Benchers in corporate accounts, will my right hon. Friend urge them to publish their own accounts soon, so that the Department can assist them in studying the impact on their foreign revenues of the introduction of EMU?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important and interesting point. He is right. The Conservative party should be encouraged to publish proper accounts and should recognise that there are a number of examples of cases in which, for a variety of reasons, various individuals and companies have been given time to prepare proper accounts, including some which might be rather closer to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) than the example that he gave.

Science Policy

5. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** When she last met the chairmen of the research councils to discuss science policy. [19872]

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I are in regular contact with members of the research councils. I met the chairmen formally on 29 October to discuss a range of science policy issues. I have arranged to meet them again formally in the new year, on 11 March.

Mrs. Bottomley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the importance of maintaining a strong science base to our competitive position for the future? Did he hear Sir Richard Sykes at the British Association for the Advancement of Science annual conference say that the system was creaking at the seams? He comes from an industry that employs 20,000 scientists and spends something like £5.5 million a day. The research councils want no more delays, no more reviews, no more buck passing. They want action. What does the hon. Gentleman intend to do?

Mr. Battle: I seem to recall that the right hon. Lady was a member of the Medical Research Council in 1987–88. I seem to recall that I was present when Sir Richard Sykes made his remarks, in which he spelt out the impact on research of the previous Government's Budgets. We pick up the pieces of that, and we shall work hard to ensure that we have an excellent science, engineering and technology base. We shall work hard to defend it.

Mr. Miller: Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to discuss with the chairman the important work of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, especially its recent statements on the risk that some people will become uninsurable as a result of the actions of insurance companies? Does my hon. Friend agree that the House, which unanimously supported the creation of the commission, with the involvement of the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), ought unanimously to deplore the actions of such insurance companies?

Mr. Battle: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. The Government welcome the publication yesterday of the commission's report, "Implications of Genetic Testing for Insurance". The commission issued its report at the same time as the Association of British Insurers met its long-standing commitment as an industry to publish its views. The contribution of the commission to the debate is important. We shall consider its views carefully and make recommendations. We shall respond in detail in the new year, but we welcome the report as an important contribution to the debate.

Mr. Lansley: Further to his meetings with the chairmen of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, what action does the Minister propose to take to safeguard the scientific, technological and commercial expertise of the Royal Greenwich observatory in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who is in her place?

Mr. Battle: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is an inherited position. On 4 July we released PPARC from the prior options dogma of the previous Government. At the same time I said that when PPARC made its decision about where to locate astronomy, it should

explore every possible avenue to keep the observatory alive. I hope that that conversation is continuing because the good name of that institution ought to be retained.

Renewable Energy

6. **Mr. Pickthall:** If she will make a statement about her Department's policy towards promoting the greater use of renewable energy sources. [19873]

Mr. Battle: The Government are undertaking a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with our manifesto commitment. The policy review that I announced on 6 June is considering what action is necessary and practicable in order to achieve our target of generating 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom's electricity needs from renewable energy by 2010. On 25 November, I announced proposals for a fifth non-fossil fuel obligation order, which allows new bids for renewable projects.

Mr. Pickthall: I fully support the renewable energy policy and commend the work that my hon. Friend has done, but does he agree that subsidising wind turbines in upland areas of high landscape value with public money is an outrage? Should we not be looking at Danish models—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps we should do that, too. Should we not study placing wind turbines on offshore sites, as the Danes do, where they do no damage to the environment, visual or otherwise, rather than degrading our wonderful upland areas?

Mr. Battle: I share my hon. Friend's view that we must locate wind turbines in appropriate sites. In taking measures to promote renewable energy, we must ensure that we do not jeopardise the environment as a whole. That means that we have to recognise the importance of policies to protect the landscape and wildlife, whether in areas of outstanding natural beauty or sites of special scientific interest. It is up to the local planning process to ensure that proposals for projects are located sensibly, sensitively and in agreement with local people. I hope that that has happened. Onshore wind projects make a significant, though not major, contribution. I encourage my hon. Friend by pointing out that offshore wind projects have been accepted and that two have been awarded non-fossil fuel obligation 4 contracts.

Mrs. Browning: Does the Minister recall writing to me on 25 November in response to a letter that I sent him on 26 August in which I requested clarification of the Government's policy on prioritising all the fuels available to them for generating power? His reply said that he was surprised that I had asked such a question and that it hardly fell to Government to prioritise fuels. That does not seem to align with the answer that he gave the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) or with the announcement of the Deputy Prime Minister on gas-fired power stations. Will he now give me a substantive reply or must I wait another three months?

Mr. Battle: If I recall her letter rightly, the hon. Lady asked whether we would fix percentages for certain fuels.

Mrs. Browning: No.

Mr. Battle: If she meant something different, it was hard to discern it from her letter. It was her party that put every source of fuel generation into the private sector and let them compete in a marketplace. It is hardly becoming for her to suggest that we go back and fix the lot.

Single Currency

7. **Mr. Robathan:** What representations she has received from business about the effect of a single currency. [19874]

Mrs. Beckett: I receive a variety of representations from business about a wide range of issues, including the single currency.

Mr. Robathan: From those representations, does the right hon. Lady agree that the overwhelming majority of small businesses oppose the single currency, as do the overwhelming majority of people in Britain? Can she tell the House exactly how many representations she has received for and against the single currency?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman figures, although we will endeavour to, if it is easy to do. Of course there is great anxiety among small businesses about the potential impact of the single currency, and that is understandable. It is particularly unfortunate that the previous Government left everyone in so much ignorance and gave small businesses in particular the impression that they did not have to consider the issues unless and until Britain made a decision to join. That was a profoundly mistaken way of conducting the debate and has left many small businesses at the mercy of misinformation and lack of planning.

The hon. Gentleman says that there is evidence of hostility. I am well aware that the Institute of Directors, for example, has expressed concern about the potential costs to small business. *[Interruption.]* Although the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), with his usual inaccuracy, says that the IOD is against, it, like the Confederation of British Industry, believes that in the long term, it is in Britain's interests to join economic and monetary union. It merely takes the view that in the short term, there could be considerable costs, particularly for small business. Those are exactly the sort of issues that we are addressing.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister confirm that if we join the single currency, under article 107 or 109 of the Maastricht treaty, it will be illegal for democratically elected Parliaments to try to influence the European central bank on issues such as unemployment or, indeed, general economic policy?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend should recognise that the criteria that were decided for the statutes of the central bank, which underlay the moves towards economic and monetary union, were discussed before the new Government came to power. We have to live with our legal inheritance. Given that, we have always taken the view, and it is now being argued strongly by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, that the economic advantage and disadvantage to Britain, the balance involved in how those issues are handled, and how and whether we get sustainable convergence, retain flexibility to operate and address employment issues, are exactly the issues about which the Government are concerned and which we are seeking to consider.

My hon. Friend must also be aware that most recently, particularly since we came into office, we have brought the issue of employment and employability high up the agenda of the European Union.

Mr. Breed: Does the Secretary of State agree that not only is a great education programme about the single currency needed for business during next year, but that it should be widened to include the whole country because from 1999 that change will affect every person? It is clear that there is extreme ignorance about how the single currency will affect all our lives.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. Among the many damaging legacies that we inherited from the previous Government is the utterly mistaken assumption that if economic and monetary union goes ahead and Britain is not a member, that is a matter of indifference to us. It will have a huge impact on our financial services, on the competitiveness of our companies and on the way in which we trade. Some British-based companies are already proposing to do many of their transactions in euros. The single currency will have an impact on people's lives. I know that the retail sector, for example, is increasingly aware of that and is beginning to cope with it. It is sad that it was not encouraged to do so by the previous Government.

Inward Investment

8. **Mr. Olner:** How many jobs she estimates have been created in the United Kingdom since 1 May as a result of inward investment. [19875]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In addition to projects already notified to the Invest in Britain Bureau since 1 May involving 7,893 new jobs, there have been some more recent announcements such as Capital One creating 900 jobs in the east midlands, ADI creating 600 new jobs in the north-east, Cadence creating 1,800 new jobs in Scotland and Pfizer creating 1,000 new jobs in the south-east. That is clear evidence that the United Kingdom remains the best place in Europe for companies to do business.

Mr. Olner: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. That some of those new jobs have been created in the midlands is particularly welcome. Can my hon. Friend confirm that those jobs have been created because of the Government's economic competence and because of their ties with Europe and the fact that they want to work in partnership with fellow European firms? Will he also comment on the fact that inward investment is not at all threatened by the fact that we want to introduce a minimum wage to make working conditions tolerable for the lower-paid?

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The hallmark of all that inward investment is good employment practice, investment in the work force, training and good working conditions. They make for a successful enterprise. The marked feature of those companies that have announced the creation of new jobs today, and those that have done so in the past, is that they want to work in partnership with the Government not only here but in Europe and in partnership with their work forces. By doing so, they will create and build a better economy in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tom King: The Minister has recognised the importance of inward investment, so could he comment on the statement that appeared in this week's edition of *The Economist* that whereas the agenda of the Industrial Development Advisory Board used to have a considerable number of items on it for consideration which were designed to support inward investment, the last four meetings of it have been cancelled because of the absence of any items to be included on that agenda?

Mr. McCartney: The IDAB meets when it needs to meet to make investment decisions. This country has a significant number of on-going projects which, if successful, will create thousands of new jobs, such as those that I have just announced. Since 1 May, more than 7,000 jobs have been created. The Government are working to maintain Britain as the No. 1 location for inward investment and it will remain thus because of the Government's policies.

Mr. Derek Foster: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to commend the outstanding record of the Northern Development Company, which has won inward investment under the chairmanship of Sir George Russell? Will he further ensure that a Dutch auction between Scotland, Wales and the English regions for winning new jobs is avoided at all costs? Will he ensure that there is a level playing field for the English regions?

Mr. McCartney: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful question, which gives me an opportunity to make it clear that this Government, and this Government alone, have started to take a co-ordinated approach towards the English regions, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. As a consequence, senior Ministers are considering the arrangements for the concordat between all parts of the United Kingdom and there will be an announcement on those arrangements when they are ready. The concordat will ensure that Britain remains the No. 1 European investment portfolio. That will mean that every part of the United Kingdom—Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions—will have the opportunity to attract new investment and new jobs.

Mr. Chidgey: Does the Minister share my concern at the fact that the withdrawal of a number of major investments from the far east owing to the particular problems there is now threatening the expected job creation programmes in those areas? Does he accept that competition for inward investment on the basis of Government grants alone is becoming more or less unsustainable? Is not the key issue in most of the decisions the quality and level of skills of the local work force? In the context of the Government's programme for a concordat to spread best practice throughout the regions, what action does the Minister propose to take to ensure that that best practice includes high skills training that is spread outward and implemented through the regional development agencies?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we cannot rely on grants alone. What is

required is a package that includes infrastructure, skills development, new skills, the upgrading of skills and the opportunity for employers to enter a local labour market and succeed because the necessary skills exist. That is why my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is to issue a competitiveness White Paper, working with industry, and establishing a benchmark and audit to ensure that, in every sector of the economy, skills are upgraded and skills shortages can be dealt with.

This is the first Government in two decades to have taken the issue seriously, which is why industry after industry is working with the Government to improve the competitiveness of the UK economy. That process includes many of the inward investments that are now working with the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure the upgrading of skills and infrastructure.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my hon. Friend expect any further inward investment initiatives involving the Nomura bank of Japan? As the bank is reported to have made a £350 million windfall profit as a result of the sale of a train rolling stock company—a valuable public asset that was disposed of by the previous Government at about half its value—do the Government expect the beneficiaries of the windfall profit to be looking to invest in the United Kingdom?

Mr. McCartney: We as a Government have a clear policy of trying to attract inward investment from a range of sources that includes companies, such as the one mentioned by my hon. Friend, which have a record of investment. We want to try to ensure that, whatever the company and wherever the company's headquarters, it will invest in the United Kingdom. That will bring new investment and new job opportunities to a range of sectors in the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Boswell: It is nice to stand opposite the Minister of State at the Dispatch Box and hear him concede that the inward investment position that he inherited from the previous Government was the strongest in Europe. Has he noticed that, despite the minor league successes that he has claimed, when it comes to the main event, the cup final, the score is Toyota 1-United Kingdom 1 under a Conservative Government and Toyota 2-United Kingdom 0 under a Labour Government? Is that not a good litmus test of the success or comparative success of investment policies? Will the Minister spend a little time over the Christmas recess searching his conscience and reflecting on whether a number of aspects of the present Government's policy, including the minimum wage, may be damaging our competitiveness and our attraction?

Mr. McCartney: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been in the job for less than 24 hours, but he did not need to come to the Dispatch Box just to show how ignorant he is of the subject that he has been given at such short notice. Toyota has made it absolutely clear that it has invested in two of its three European models in the United Kingdom. The company has already said that it will increase its investment in the UK and that the UK is central to its European operations. It has also said that 50 per cent. and more of the goods and services going into the French plant will come from the UK supply base exporting into Europe. As for the minimum wage, in raising that subject in the way he did, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should also have declared an interest.

Mobile Telephones

9. **Mr. Pound:** If she will make a statement about the development of the third-generation mobile telephones. [19877]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are determined that the UK should be at the forefront in Europe in the provision of third-generation mobile communications. Therefore, we published a detailed consultation document in July setting out the proposed licensing and regulation framework for third-generation mobile communications operators. The Government are giving careful consideration to all the comments that have been received and we shall consult the industry further as proposals are developed in more detail.

Mr. Pound: I give a warm welcome to my hon. Friend's answer and to the fact that the Government clearly recognise the opportunities for business offered by new telecommunications technology. Will she accept my assurance that many leading UK companies also welcome that? Those companies include Ericsson, which, although unfortunately located slightly to the west of my constituency, sponsors Queens Park Rangers football club, which, although located slightly to the east of my constituency, numbers among its many thousands of supporters a small group who have been positively identified as living in Ealing, North. Will she tell the House what is the Government's preferred technology for the third generation of mobile telephones?

Mrs. Roche: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his ingenuity and his constituents on having such an able representative, who contrives to mention his constituency at every opportunity—something that is warmly appreciated. The Government are taking a lead within the European Telecommunications Standards Institute, which is developing the technical standards for third-generation mobile phones. I am delighted to be able to tell the House that, this week, my officials have been attending an ETSI meeting and I have instructed them to support the wide band code division multiple access standard. That standard offers the best chance of a single global standard for the third generation, which will give European companies the opportunity to compete in world markets.

Foresight Programme

10. **Mr. Connarty:** What mechanisms she will employ to improve co-ordination across Departments in implementing the foresight programme. [19878]

Mrs. Beckett: I commissioned an audit of the foresight programme across Government within four weeks of taking office. On 22 October, I published the findings and announced that a ministerial foresight group was being established under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry to provide top-level co-ordination of the foresight programme across Whitehall. That group met for the first time last week and will take regular progress reports from the Whitehall foresight group, which co-ordinates departmental participation at official level. Those actions demonstrate the Government's commitment to foresight and our determination to drive it forward.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Obviously, regional involvement will play a key

part in the success of the foresight programme. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's decision to allocate £7.5 million for foresight-related research in Scotland over the next three years?

Mrs. Beckett: Indeed, I shall. I am aware of that allocation and warmly welcome it. My hon. Friend is entirely right that, in taking forward the foresight programme, we need both to develop its regional impact and initiative and to use the supply chain to spread awareness of its work and the contribution that it can make down to small and medium businesses across the country. We are continuing to do exactly that.

Mr. Donaldson: Will the President of the Board of Trade join me in welcoming the commitment by the private sector to advances in technology over the years? I am thinking particularly of companies such as Bombardier Shorts in Belfast. How much are the Government prepared to commit to the foresight programme, in terms of financial support for that vital industry? When will that support be forthcoming?

Mrs. Beckett: We have already announced up to £10 million for the future of the foresight link programme, and £5 million for the foresight vehicle link programme. We are committed to the development and advancement of that programme, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know that we are also engaged in a comprehensive spending review, right across the Government. I am therefore not in a position to tell him how we shall be placed in future years, but I can assure him that that is an important priority for the Department—all the more so because it draws in the wider business community, which is making a valuable contribution to the work.

Mr. Beard: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a high proportion of the foresight programme depends on biotechnology, and that Britain may not reap the full benefits of its position in biotechnology unless active steps are taken to alleviate public anxiety about the application of that technology?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right—those issues do need to be addressed. We are engaging in public consultation on them, but we believe it vital that there should be a wide spread of information and sensibly encouraged thorough debate. People must be aware of the impact of the decisions that can be made, and of the market potential for creative British scientists and companies.

Chambers of Commerce

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** How frequently and by what mechanism she consults chambers of commerce; and if she will make a statement. [19879]

Mrs. Roche: I consult chambers of commerce through their national representative organisation, the British Chambers of Commerce, and also through individual chambers. For example, the BCC is a valued national partner which participates in various business link working groups which meet at regular intervals throughout the year.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister think about bringing the chambers of commerce into more regular and routine consultations, which is what they tell me they would value? For instance, we now have a draft Budget; they could be formally consulted on it, so that we could know their responses to the budgetary proposals. The chambers also have views on local government finance and other Government policies. They want to know that those views are collected and part of the public debate. If the Minister would do that for them, they would be very pleased.

Mrs. Roche: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we consult the chambers of commerce very regularly. Indeed, a couple of weeks ago, I met them two days running. We contact them continually, and did so over our recent late payment legislation. They are a partner that is valued by the Department and the Government.

Mr. Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although there are some good chambers of commerce, there are some pretty awful ones too? Is she evaluating chambers of commerce that have amalgamated with business links and training and enterprise councils, to see how successful they have been? If there is to be regeneration at the grass roots, let it be done with best practice; and let us put an end to some of those lawyers' talking shops which do not deal with the local economic situation.

Mrs. Roche: I warmly welcome the great work done by chambers of commerce in consulting their members, in setting up an accreditation system and in forming core chambers. My hon. Friend is right to point out that there have been successful mergers, many of them with good practices. When such mergers take place, we must obtain proper value for public money, and small and medium businesses, to which the Government are so committed, must be given the service that they need.

Mrs. Gillan: In her very regular consultations with chambers of commerce, the hon. Lady will no doubt have discovered that many of their members, especially small retailers, have been deeply worried by the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, who boasted to consumers in August, in an interview with the *Sunday Mirror*, that he would slash the prices of fridges, televisions, videos and perfume by 30 per cent. before Christmas. Has he done that? No. That is another promise to the consumer broken by the Government. Will not the only wrapping that this Minister gets for Christmas be a rapping over his knuckles?

Mrs. Roche: In the true Christmas spirit, I congratulate the hon. Lady on her punchy question, but I say to her that I have had no such message from retailers. Small businesses have expressed warm appreciation of our policy.

It is always good to see the hon. Lady, and it is interesting to note what she has to say on that subject. Recently, she told *The Sunday Times* that the Conservative party's failure with small business had

contributed to its losing the general election. She told the *The Sunday Times* and the Federation of Small Businesses that very little policy on business—and especially small businesses—will emanate from the Opposition. We have noticed that again today.

Energy Sources

12. **Jacqui Smith:** What action her Department is taking to secure diverse and reliable sources of energy. [19880]

Mr. Battle: The Government's energy policy is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable energy at competitive prices. We are reviewing a number of specific policy areas, such as the regulation of utilities, support for renewables and clean coal technology. On 3 December, I announced a review looking into how the issues of security of supply and fuel diversity should be addressed in considering applications for power station developments. We propose to defer decisions on outstanding applications for power station consents until that review has been completed. The formal terms of reference of the review will be announced shortly.

Jacqui Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. On the subject of energy, I commend him and his ministerial colleagues for being an especially good and reliable source of energy themselves, in the excellent work that they have undertaken since taking office. What effect will the Kyoto agreement have on the United Kingdom's energy policy? Will not new technology, such as clean coal technology, have an important role to play in enabling the UK to reach its targets?

Mr. Battle: In the Kyoto deal, for the first time, all the developed countries have agreed to take on legally binding emission targets, and the deal will lead to a real reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The targets are 5.2 per cent. below 1990 levels for developed countries. The European Union has agreed to an 8 per cent. cut. The UK has a domestic aim of reducing emissions to 20 per cent. below 1990 levels. We shall work on ways to achieve that aim, but I agree with my hon. Friend that clean coal technology is vital in securing the future of deep-mined coal; that is why we are supporting it and doing what we can to back it. It will have a part to play in meeting our emissions targets.

Mr. Paterson: When considering energy policy, which has priority—offering the British consumer the cheapest possible electricity, honouring environmental commitments at Kyoto or keeping people in jobs in the energy industries?

Mr. Battle: They all have a priority, but we inherited a difficult situation because the Conservative Government had fragmented the energy sectors and forced them to compete with one another. When coal, or any other sector, is being priced out because the playing field has been stacked against it, we work hard—as we have worked hard—to ensure that there is a level playing field, to ensure that there is a place for coal in future energy policy.

Mr. O'Neill: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he and his colleagues have done to redress some of the imbalance against the coal industry. Will he, in the course of his review, consider looking at the ownership of the power stations that are currently in the hands of PowerGen and National Power and are not being used to burn coal? If those owners are not prepared to use those stations for the purpose for which they are intended, will my hon. Friend suggest that they divest themselves of them and sell them to people who might be prepared to use British coal to create electricity, securing jobs for British workers?

Mr. Battle: I do not need to remind my hon. Friend that we no longer own the power generators, and three independent companies are coming on stream. I hope that the review into the pool mechanism—the buying-in system for power stations—will help to ensure that there is a level playing field and that some fuels are not priced out.

Mr. Letwin: In the light of the Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), will he admit that he was effectively saying that he has not the slightest idea what the priorities of his energy policy are?

Mr. Battle: I sometimes wonder whether Opposition Members are on this earth or Fuller's. I can only reply as I did earlier: we want secure, diverse and sustainable energy at competitive prices. Perhaps it is beyond the wit of Opposition Members to understand that complex equation.

Soft Drinks

13. **Helen Jones:** If she will investigate the levels of profits on sales of soft drinks in public houses. [19881]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Nigel Griffiths): My main concern is about prices. The industry report published on 17 November revealed that consumers buying soft drinks in pubs were getting small measures, bad choice and poor quality. Those who choose non-alcoholic drinks deserve a fairer deal. I am determined to give it to them.

Helen Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is it not plainly ridiculous that consumers are often charged more for non-alcoholic drinks than for alcoholic drinks? When I studied the matter in my area, I found that one pub charged £1.70 for lime and soda but only £1.65 for cider; another charged £1.70 for coke and £1.20 for lager and lime. Not only is that unfair to consumers, but it detracts from the Government's campaign to stop drinking and driving. Does my hon. Friend agree that the practice is not only unfair but dangerous?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes, it certainly does not help. I have left leading representatives of the drinks industry in no doubt about our concern over the prices of soft drinks.

Consumer Protection

14. **Mr. Ainger:** What measures her Department has taken to improve consumer protection standards. [19882]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: How long do I have? We have introduced the toughest firework safety campaign ever

and new laws to protect the public against dangerous goods. We have sent out warnings to 19 million gas users about carbon monoxide dangers and have introduced a host of other measures. In short, we are making up for lost time.

Mr. Ainger: I congratulate my hon. Friend and his team on the work that they have done in the past seven months to protect and enhance consumers' interests. He will be aware of the alarm and concern expressed by consumer groups and reputable bakers at the previous Government's attempt to deregulate the weights of the traditional British loaf. I am aware that negotiations have taken place with the European Commission on this issue. What are the results of those negotiations? Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the Government will protect the traditional British loaf?

Mr. Griffiths: While it is true that the previous Government's actions in 1993 prompted the European Commission to intervene and oppose our limits on bread sizes, we have successfully negotiated with the Commission to retain the traditional small and standard loaf and avoid consumers being short-changed.

Mr. Bercow: Was the Minister reprimanded after he intervened to prejudice the outcome of the inquiry into the pricing of electrical goods? Did he suffer a penalty from the President of the Board of Trade? Given that this is the fourth occasion on which the hon. Gentleman has been removed from involvement in a competition matter, is it not now time that he was removed from office permanently?

Mr. Griffiths: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman believes the tale told twice by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). It is completely unreliable information and he is mistaken to tell the House that I have been removed from the electrical retailing inquiry. I intend to maintain my keen interest in those matters. In terms of the legislation that we have been considering since May, perhaps the House would like me to add a measure on misleading information from the Conservative party.

British Aerospace

15. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** When she will make a decision on the application by British Aerospace for launch aid for the A340–500/600. [19883]

Mr. Battle: British Aerospace's application is under consideration. We shall make a decision as soon as possible.

Mr. Prentice: I thank my hon. Friend, and warmly congratulate him on the decision last month to invest £200 million in the development of the Rolls-Royce Trent 500 engine, which will power the new long-haul airbus 340-500/600 series aeroplane. May I remind him that, if the Government invest in the new airbus, 50 per cent. of the content of those planes will be British? There is understandable nervousness not just in British Aerospace, but throughout the north-west, in Lancashire and especially in my constituency, in anticipation of the Government reaching an early decision, and the right decision, to invest in that project.

Mr. Battle: My hon. Friend has a record of championing the industry in the House, and he clearly continues to do so. Rolls-Royce was a unique case. It is the United Kingdom's only large aero-engine manufacturer, and one of only three in the world, so I welcome his comments. The Government welcome the official launch of the A340-500/600 on 8 December. The large number of potential customers who attended the launch is an encouraging sign of success for the programme. I recognise that BAe's application has taken time. All the issues must be considered thoroughly, and the decision will be announced as soon as we can do so.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to say that I did not arrive in the Chamber yesterday in time to receive notice of the point of order made by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). Having read it and the exchanges on Tuesday night, I regret that, during the rough and tumble of those exchanges, I appeared so dismissive of the point that he made. Although that legislation was of a general character, if he and other hon. Members consider that I ought to have referred to my specific business interests, I apologise to them, to the House and to you.

Madam Speaker: The House and I are very grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter arising from the business statement made by the Leader of the House last week, reported in *Hansard* at column 1197, in which I notice that, having given the business for this week, she went on to talk about the provisional business for the first week after the Christmas recess. At this stage, we know no more about the business for that week than was given as provisional last week by the right hon. Lady.

I was astonished, therefore, to see that the Leader of the House was not seeking to make a definitive statement today about the business for the first week back after the recess. That surely leaves you, and the House, in some doubt as to what the business will be that week. Will you guide the House, and perhaps give a gentle hint to the Leader of the House, so that she might repair that no doubt unintentional omission now, or failing that, come to the House on Monday and tell us what we will be doing in the week following the recess?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I will not allow a debate on a point of order, but I see that the President of the Council wishes to make a further point of order.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I think that it has been for the general convenience of the House that I have been able, on many occasions in recent weeks, to announce two weeks' business. The second week is always provisional, and that provisional announcement stands, unless a change is made. There is no need to make any change in this case, so the provisional business that I announced last week stands as the business for the first week back.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not true that the purpose of the business statement is not just to tell the House the business, but to give Back Benchers the opportunity to raise issues of concern? If I understand correctly what the right hon. Lady said, if she announces two weeks' business, and the business stands for the second week, we shall never have a business statement in the second week.

I want to raise an issue that is new since last week. I am concerned about the serious situation that exists in agriculture, and the worrying situation for farmers. How can we find out when the House will get a statement on that matter, before the House rises and before farmers are left with a worrying Christmas and new year?

Madam Speaker: I can deal with the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question. He obviously was not in the House yesterday, but I understand that a statement will be made before the House rises.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following the very gracious statement made by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), I ask you how we will handle the problem caused by his replacement, the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who is an employer of agricultural workers and is to lead for the Opposition on the minimum wage Bill, which deals with precisely that subject—

Madam Speaker: Order. Those are not points of order, and they have nothing whatever to do with me.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In the absence of a business statement in which the Leader of the House could tell us what business the House will consider before the recess, is it in order that the BBC should be informed of the details of an impending statement on Monday regarding the terms of reference of an inquiry into bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease? How can hon. Members be sure that we will be informed first of business and of details of business, rather than learning about it through the media and through departmental briefings to the media?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have always deprecated statements being made to the media before they are made in the House. He knows also that the right hon. Lady gave the business of the House for the coming week. I do not pay much attention to the media or the BBC—they are not always as accurate as they might be. Many Ministers and other hon. Members comment on newspaper and media reports. I think that we should concern ourselves with business in the House rather than with what is written and broadcast outside it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may recall that yesterday I raised a point of order concerning declarations of interest at Question Time and you said that—if I wanted to—I could write to the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. I have done that, and I shall send you a copy of the letter. According to *Hansard*, you advised my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) to do so also.

The point I wish to raise today does not arise from the earlier statement by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). The national minimum wage measure will be considered by the House of Commons, and I think that it is very important that, during debates, at Question Time and in interventions, those hon. Members who have an interest—such as a financial interest—in opposing a national minimum wage should declare it to the House.

With the greatest respect to you, Madam Speaker, I think that that illustrates the need for some sort of declaration of interest at Question Time.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Before you consider the matter fully, do you not think that the same principle would apply to any hon. Member who is sponsored by a trade union, for example? If we are talking about an alleged connection between a Member of Parliament and those who might stand to gain from a national minimum wage of whatever level, presumably exactly the same constraints must apply to any hon. Member who is sponsored by a trade union.

Madam Speaker: The issue is rather more complicated than many hon. Members realise when they raise such matters. For that reason, I thought it wise that the matter should be submitted to the Procedure Committee so that it may examine all sides of the problem.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Perhaps I can be helpful on a couple of matters in this season of good will. On the first question, there are no sponsored Members of Parliament any more. As to raising points of order about business questions, I remind you, Madam Speaker—you will probably recall it—that last week the shadow Leader of the House complained bitterly about having to return on Monday 22 December. I thought that hon. Members rose during business questions to ask that particular matters be raised in the House in the following week. As the Tory party does not wish to be here next week, what are Opposition Members complaining about?

Madam Speaker: On that note, we must move on to the main business of the House.

Clerk of the House (Retirement)

3.38 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): I beg to move,

That Madam Speaker be requested to convey to Sir Donald William Limon KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of this House, the House's gratitude for his long and distinguished career, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

I am sure that, in moving this motion, I can unite the House, and that hon. Members on both sides will support it—from those few hon. Members whose experiences range to the days before Donald Limon joined the Clerks Department to those hon. Members who were elected earlier this year and who, for the first time, had the advantage of one of the changes introduced by Sir Donald: induction for new Members.

Sir Donald has worked in the House since 1956, which means that more than 100 Members were not even born when he first came here. Not surprisingly, his career has witnessed remarkable and sweeping changes, including—some new Members may not realise this—changes to the procedures and workings of the House.

Sir Donald has not only witnessed change; he has been a key figure in promoting change. As Clerk to the European Select Committee and to the Select Committee on the Treasury, in the early stages of their development, he made an important contribution to the successful development of the present Select Committee system. He was the first secretary to the Public Accounts Commission when the National Audit Office was set up in its present form in 1983, and he was the first secretary to the House of Commons Commission.

In 1990, when Sir Robin Ibbs was asked by the House of Commons Commission to review the provision to Members of the services of the House, Sir Donald was a member of the team that made wide-ranging recommendations, from the structure of domestic Committees to the introduction of comprehensive financial management systems within the House.

As Clerk of the House, Sir Donald has done much to ensure that the Departments of the House actively co-operate with one another. He and his wife, Joyce, have received much praise from the staff of the House for helping to break down barriers in that area.

A Clerk of the House must have a thorough knowledge of our procedures, and the House is indebted to Sir Donald for his editorial skills in the production of the 22nd edition of "Erskine May", which appeared a few weeks ago, and which I am sure every Member has studied carefully.

The Clerks of the House must possess knowledge of our procedures, have the temperament to manage to remain calm in the Chamber and be able to be patient with Members whose familiarity with the details of "Erskine May" is not quite as great as their own. I know that Sir Donald will not mind me using this occasion to praise not only himself but his team for all the work that they do, and to express our thanks to the Clerks of the House as a whole.

Sir Donald's qualities of combining great knowledge of our procedures with a practical approach to problems that arise from time to time—his approachability, combined

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

with his complete impartiality—have made him an outstanding asset to the House. We are grateful to Sir Donald, and he and Lady Limon will carry with them into retirement our appreciation, our thanks and our best wishes.

3.42 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): On behalf of the Opposition, I am delighted to associate those of us on the Opposition Benches with the tribute paid to Sir Donald Limon by the Leader of the House. The whole House will wish to give warm support to the motion of gratitude to Sir Donald for his more than 40 years of distinguished service—latterly, of course, as Clerk of the House.

As the House will have heard, Sir Donald joined the Clerks Department in 1956. Since then he has been closely involved with the many changes, both institutional and procedural, that the House has introduced over that time. His career illustrates the evolutionary spirit of change that characterises our parliamentary democracy.

As the Leader of the House has said, it would be impossible to overstate the debt that the whole House owes the Clerks for their knowledge, their commitment, their experience and their dedication to the House and what that represents. Sir Donald, in his many years of service, personifies that knowledge, that experience, and that dedication as well as a great deal of patience and courtesy, along with the ability, on occasions, to keep a straight face.

Since the general election, with so many new Members on both sides of the House and with the dramatic change of role for all existing Members, the skills and knowledge of the Clerk of the House have been much in demand, as many hon. Members wrestle with procedures and customs, some of which may seem curious, but all of which have their origins in the protection of the House, its role in our parliamentary democracy, and the interests and rights of Members and their constituents.

Sir Donald has applied wisdom, tact and practical common sense to these and all matters throughout his long and distinguished career. I wish him and Lady Limon a long, happy and fruitful retirement. They will carry with them the gratitude and affection of us all.

3.44 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I wish to associate the Liberal Democrats with what has been said by the Leader of the House and by the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), the shadow Leader of the House, and to express our own gratitude and best wishes to Sir Donald and Lady Limon.

We particularly appreciate the way in which Sir Donald has been prepared to help individual Back Benchers and smaller parties—I no longer include the Liberal Democrats in that category—and the way in which, under his leadership, his Department dedicates itself to the whole House in a pluralistic, political way. His formidable knowledge and talents have been made available to us all, and we are truly grateful to him for that.

From my experience outside the House, when somebody retires, the most formidable contribution that he or she has to make is to ensure that no gap is left, and that the team that is left behind is as formidable and dedicated to the task. That is certainly true in Sir Donald's case, and we appreciate that. The skill, dedication and calibre of the team he leaves is a tribute to his leadership.

I shall underline just one other point—the way in which the Clerks, under Sir Donald's leadership, have been prepared to tackle difficult changes and respond to the challenges that the House has thrown at them. His Department has dedicated itself to that, not just for the good of the House but for the nation.

3.46 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I am delighted to associate myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends with the motion.

The motion refers to Sir Donald Limon's distinguished career. It is perfectly clear that that is not an empty phrase. It has indeed been a very distinguished career. He has made a significant contribution to the House and to the evolution and change of its procedures.

All of us in the House are heavily dependent on the Clerks. Perhaps those parties that are still small are even more dependent on the Clerks for their help and guidance, which has always been given to us unstintingly and very helpfully, and as Clerk of the House, Sir Donald has the titular responsibility for that. It is therefore quite appropriate that we take opportunities such as this to express our appreciation and gratitude to the Clerks generally, and particularly to Sir Donald and his wife for what they have done for the House and for hon. Members.

I hope that Sir Donald and Lady Limon will have a good and rewarding retirement. It is clear he has many interests that he can pursue during his retirement. We wish him well as he leaves the House.

3.47 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I very much appreciate this opportunity, on behalf of my colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour party, to wish Sir Donald and Lady Limon a very happy retirement. I should like to be associated with the very erudite expressions of appreciation that have already been made, to which I would not aspire, except to say that, on behalf of my colleagues, I wish Sir Donald and Lady Limon the peace of Christmas, and health in the new year. I hope that the attributes of peace and health will be with them for the many years of their lives that I hope that they have in front of them.

3.48 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I, too, am delighted to associate myself with the remarks that have been expressed in connection with Sir Donald's retirement. I wish him well.

Those of us who represent smaller parties, such as Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party, sometimes try to punch above our weight, yet whenever we have approached Sir Donald—or any other members of his staff—in connection with the sometimes labyrinthine procedures of the House, we have never been met with anything other than courtesy and the greatest assistance.

I wish Sir Donald and Lady Limon a very long and happy retirement. I am sure that he will watch with interest the development of procedures in the Scottish

Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. If he has any advice to offer, we will welcome it. I can assure him of a very warm welcome any time that he visits those establishments.

3.49 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I, too, associate myself with the remarks made by those who have gone before me. Representing, as I do, one of the smallest parties in the House, I should like to say that we have always found the Clerks of the House, especially Sir Donald, most willing to help, encourage and instruct.

I look upon the Clerks as a guiding star. I learned in another place, which was a replica of this place, that, when the Speaker, or the occupant of the Chair, leaned forward to talk to the Clerks, I was on good ground, because the Speaker was not sure whether to call me to order or not. But when the Clerk turned round and initiated a discussion with the Speaker, I knew that I was in for trouble. Therefore, the Clerks have always been my guiding star, and I hope to keep my eye on who comes next.

3.50 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The House has been blessed in its senior Clerks, and Donald Limon is one of the most distinguished of that line. Of the many good works that he has carried out, not only for the House, one should particularly mention the job that he has done in relation to other Commonwealth Parliaments.

Sir Donald has gone out of his way to assist Commonwealth Clerks and Commonwealth Parliaments generally. I had the honour of serving with him on a seminar in Africa, which I thoroughly enjoyed. One particularly indignant Commonwealth Clerk was holding forth, giving the opinion that no Member of Parliament should be able to serve unless he or she knew the Standing Orders back to front. The next questioner then asked me whether I thought that that was correct, and I said, "Well, yes, except that it would rule out perhaps half the House of Commons." I do not know who it was, but a little voice alongside me was heard to mutter, "Two thirds."

We will miss the wit, intelligence and commitment of Donald Limon, and not just because he has served every Member of the House with great charm and understanding of how individual and awkward Members of Parliament can be. Above all, we shall miss Donald Limon the man. We shall miss his particular personality; his ability to make us all laugh with an absolutely straight face, something which he has succeeded in passing on to all his colleagues in the Clerks Department.

We shall miss a man who understood that his commitment was to the House of Commons, and that democracy needs people with that breadth of vision, and who has kept us firmly on the path that ensures that the mother of Parliaments will remain of importance everywhere in the world.

I shall miss Donald Limon a great deal. I send him and Joyce my very warmest regards and my great appreciation as a small and totally unimportant part, not only of a small party but of a virtually non-existent one—all Back Benchers.

3.52 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South–West Surrey): I, too, wish to add my comments to those already made about the great distinction, discretion and integrity of Donald Limon. It has been my privilege for many years to be his Member of Parliament. It is a source of regret that, upon his forthcoming retirement, he will move out of the area. At least, he assured me that that was the reason, as opposed to any lack of quality in the local representation.

I am delighted that Sir Donald has remained a distinguished office holder of the Churt cricket club, and I shall in future seek to attend more of its functions on a more regular basis.

3.53 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): As a long-standing member of the Procedure Committee, I associate myself with the warm tributes that have been paid to Sir Donald this afternoon and with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in relation to Sir Donald's work with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I wish Sir Donald and Lady Limon a long and happy retirement.

3.54 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It would not normally fall to a new Member to speak in such a debate, and I cannot match the long recollections of other Members. What I can say is that I was especially taken both by the warm welcome and by the enormous courtesy that Sir Donald extended to new Members.

Sir Donald and his wife are now constituents of mine—very welcome ones—in Kingsdon, a quiet and tranquil village whose tranquillity is broken only by a flock of geese in the middle of the village. They are frequently noisy and disputatious and rarely make a lot of sense, so when Sir Donald feels a hankering after old times, he is welcome to walk down into the centre of the village.

I know that Sir Donald's friends in Somerset, as well as his friends in the House, will wish him and his wife a long and happy retirement.

3.55 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): As a middle ranker, from the middle range too, I join in the congratulations. I echo the views of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), especially about the range of activities that Sir Donald undertook within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Delegates who came here, especially for the seminars, valued the work that he did there. On the level of personal friendship, too, he was delightful.

In one sense, Madam Speaker, you might miss Sir Donald, because the Speaker's ear will have gone—but I am sure that there will be another ear. Anyway, there is always that blessedness of those in positions of authority—learning to turn a deaf ear.

Another aspect that I noticed in the record of Sir Donald's achievement was the fact that he learned manual labour in removing the hunting boots to allow another Speaker to move into the Chair. At a time when hunting has become a debatable question, it is a delight to know that Sir Donald can move to an easier chair himself.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

Not only will the House miss Sir Donald, but Members and our spouses will also miss the presence of Lady Limon. We give both of them our good wishes in retirement.

3.56 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I associate myself with all that has been said already. As a new Member, I must say how much we needed the training and help that we received when we first entered the House in May. I especially want to speak about Lady Limon, because I remember the day in June when my assistant, Emma Thorogood, and I approached the formidable front door on the fifth floor of Norman Shaw South, and knocked on it for some advice. We were welcomed in effusively, as I am sure many Members have been before.

Over the six months since then, Lady Limon has welcomed many researchers, assistants and secretaries to meet her and take tea, and has helped in their induction into Parliament. I join in what has already been said in wishing Sir Donald and Lady Limon a long and happy retirement.

Madam Speaker: Before I put the Question, I want to add my own tribute to Donald Limon. As we have heard, he has served the House with distinction for more than 40 years. His support and wise counsel, afforded to me both as a Deputy Speaker and more recently as Speaker, has been effective and unstinting. With the admirable support of his wife Joyce, he has done much to sustain the morale and commitment of staff of the House at all levels. He takes with him into retirement our grateful thanks and the knowledge that his career has fulfilled his many talents. I shall miss both the Limons very much indeed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That Madam Speaker be requested to convey to Sir Donald William Limon KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of this House, the House's gratitude for his long and distinguished career, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

Orders of the Day

Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

3.58 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill marks another important step in the Government's programme for Northern Ireland. In line with the hopes and desires of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland, the Government are looking for a society at peace—a society governed by the rule of law and clear principles of democracy—which respects the rights and traditions of all its citizens.

The Stormont talks provide us with the opportunity to secure a just and enduring settlement, and we will continue to press forward with them. We will also continue to implement fair and effective policies on security, policing and public order. We need those for their own sakes, but we must also ensure that progress in one area is not threatened by festering disputes in others.

One such area of dispute in recent years has, of course, been parades. The majority of parades in Northern Ireland pass off peacefully, but when things go wrong and local accommodation cannot be reached, parades and the counter-demonstrations associated with them have the capacity to polarise opinion, raise community tensions and generate extremes of emotion. As we have seen all too often, they can degenerate into major flashpoints of civil disorder.

The Bill is born of the Government's desire to bring about accommodation and agreement where there are disputes over parades in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): The Parades Commission will play an important role. I welcome the increase in the membership of the commission set out in schedule 1, but may I humbly and modestly suggest that three of the commissioners should be women and that one should be someone with a legal or judicial background?

Mr. Ingram: I note what my hon. Friend says. Of course, such matters may come up in Committee. From recollection, I do not think that that subject was raised in the debate in the other place, although my recollections are not 100 per cent. accurate. I will certainly see whether that and related matters were raised, but there is every likelihood that other hon. Members will discuss the composition of the independent commission in Committee.

The Bill is based on the recommendations in the report of Dr. Peter North and his colleagues published in January this year. Their review of the law and practice in relation to parades in Northern Ireland was thorough-going and their report is an invaluable contribution to thinking in this highly contentious area. We remain grateful to them for their work.

As hon. Members will be aware, the previous Government had announced the review following the appalling events surrounding the parade at Drumcree in

the summer of 1996. None of us should forget the widespread violence, disruption and lawlessness witnessed that summer. Nor should we forget the loss of life and injuries sustained by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and by those involved and caught up in the unrest, which lasted for nine days—149 RUC officers were injured and there were 192 civilian casualties, including one death. Nor should we forget the damage to property and to Northern Ireland's economy and image in the world at large. Those events prompted the review and the ensuing report.

When the report was published, we said in opposition that we accepted its findings and would implement its recommendations. With the Bill, the Government are making good our pledge. The Government's feelings on the issue were reinforced by my experience and that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State this summer. No Secretary of State could have done more to bring about accommodation and a peaceful resolution of the dispute between the two sides in Portadown this year. However, as my right hon. Friend has acknowledged, she failed, but it was not for the want of trying against what proved to be impossible odds.

As in previous years, the Chief Constable, the RUC and the Army were once again caught in the middle of two competing, inflexible forces. As the Chief Constable said so graphically at the time, the fact that public order considerations were the only ones to be taken into account meant that he had to choose between the lesser of two evils. The Bill is an attempt to ensure that no future RUC Chief Constable is boxed into that position again.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister will, of course, have noticed the significance of the date when talking about intransigent positions—18 December. Having said that, why does the hon. Gentleman expect this legislation to have any greater effect than the previous legislation, which was not impartially, adequately and fully implemented to deal with counter-protests?

Mr. Ingram: I recognise the date. I carry a lot of dates in my head and that one came to mind as the hon. Gentleman was speaking. Because I was searching for the date, I did not hear his point. I have no doubt that he will repeat the point in his speech; if he does, I will try to give him an answer today, failing which I will respond to him in writing.

It is worth repeating that, as the Chief Constable said so graphically at the time, he had to choose the lesser of two evils; that was his view this year. It is important to avoid his being in the same position again.

The Government's approach, like the North report, is based on recognising rights and responsibilities. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently published a White Paper on the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into law in Britain and Northern Ireland. The convention provides for the protection of the right to peaceful assembly which, in Northern Ireland terms, protects the right to march. It is a basic right that the Government fully recognise, but, as the convention also recognises, it must be exercised with regard to the rights and freedoms of others. Like all rights, it brings responsibilities with it.

People also have the right to live their lives free from fear and intimidation, and there is a fundamental right to demonstrate and protest peacefully against events to which one is opposed; but that, too, brings with it the responsibility to respect the rights and freedoms of others.

As the North report recognised, in Northern Ireland we have starkly competing rights. When that results in a dispute, as it does in a small number of the 3,000 or so parades each year, an accommodation has to be sought. The first goal of the Parades Commission, which will be properly established by the Bill, is to enable and facilitate the finding of such an accommodation.

The commission was set up last spring by the previous Government and chaired by Alastair Graham. It was not at that time given the full remit that North recommended, but I hope that hon. Members will agree that it has performed important work in seeking to encourage local agreement in the months since its establishment. Despite the best efforts of Alastair Graham and his team, there is no doubt that, in the future, as in recent years, attempts to find an accommodation can be frustrated if there is no willingness on either side to seek compromise.

Rev. Martin Smyth: That is a vital point, both in Londonderry and on the Ormeau road, where attempts were made in successive years to have rational discussions, but there was implacable opposition. Is the Minister aware that that opposition is developing, and not only in a few isolated areas? Seminars have been held in Belfast to promote estate control. There is a demand that there should be at least one former prisoner on each committee to control estates, and that is extending Sinn Fein-IRA control throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ingram: We are conscious of all those developments, as many of them take place in the public domain and there is public debate about them. The hon. Gentleman's point confirms the need for a Parades Commission with the role of seeking resolution to conflict. I am sure that he agrees that accommodation and the search for an agreement provide the best course for any party to a dispute.

That is why all of us in the House, and those in positions of leadership throughout Northern Ireland, have a duty to encourage both sides to seek that accommodation. We all have an important role to play in creating a different climate from the one that has prevailed over recent years. Unfortunately, we have to recognise and accept that there are likely to be occasions when that accommodation cannot be found. That is why the legislation will also empower the commission to make determinations when agreement cannot be reached.

I hope that that will always be a last resort. In itself, it will be a signal of failure, but not, I stress, on the part of the Parades Commission: it will be a failure of those on both sides of the dispute who did not succeed in reaching that desired accommodation. In making such determinations, the Parades Commission will be empowered to take account not only of public order considerations but of the wider impact that the procession may have on relationships within the community. The commission will also be able to take into account the failure of any specified person to abide by a code of conduct. The commission has already published the code of conduct and is consulting on it.

[Mr. Ingram]

As the North report recommended, the commission will take account, in coming to a view, of whether the route of a parade is of long standing. We hope that that will go some way to easing the fears of those in the loyal orders who continue to maintain that the legislation is anti-parade. It is not; nor was it ever intended to be.

I believe that the Bill is a crucial improvement on existing legislation. Might is never right; right is right. I hope that this new legislation will make that clearer than ever before.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Will the Minister go back into the history of this matter and the changing of the order relating to public order? Is he not aware that some of the matters that he has mentioned were changes that were made in that order, and that the drafter of that order was none other than Mr. Lenahan from the Dublin Parliament, who said that they had got the order on the statute book of Northern Ireland which would make it easier for them to push forward their objectives? If we have a law governing Northern Ireland that is aimed at pushing forward the objective of subverting the constitution, in no way is that law going to work.

The Minister has mentioned traditional parades, but traditional parades were taken completely away in that order. I remind the Minister that the majority of hon. Members on the Unionist Benches went to prison to highlight the matter because we realised that something dreadful would happen once the order was implemented. As we know, Gerry Adams said that he was working hard on it and had done good work on it.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman asks me to go back into history with him. I have no intention of doing so, because I do not believe that an examination of history serves any purpose. We are at a point in time when I hope that we can build for the future of Northern Ireland. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will start his history now and begin to look forward rather than constantly looking back. That is a vision and hope that the vast majority of people of Northern Ireland want from their local politicians and from the Government.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No. I have given way enough. I may give way later.

The legislation is designed to assist the rule of law, and to discourage those who would seek to break it. In proposing the legislation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that we would take into account concerns raised with us and be sensitive to views of those on both sides of the community.

The legislation, and the independent commission, require the support and co-operation of the whole community if they are to succeed. It was in that spirit that the Government took on board concerns raised with us this summer that the legislation was too narrowly focused on the cultural expressions of one community.

The extended remit, as it was called, of the Bill when it was first introduced in another place was designed to meet those concerns and to enable the commission to look at other cultural expressions that might have an adverse effect on relationships within the community. However, during the Bill's passage in the other place, it became clear that there was cross-community opposition to that provision. The Bill was, therefore, amended to take account of the united opposition to the proposal, and the extended remit was eventually removed from the Bill on Report.

However, the Government's determination to ensure that the legislation is even-handed remains undiminished. We will continue to consider carefully all suggestions to ensure that our commitment to implement the findings of the North report is fulfilled in a balanced and even-handed way. The Government remain open to advice from right hon. and hon. Members of all parties to that effect, both before and during Committee.

It is worth pointing out that several other useful amendments were made in the other place that are generally acknowledged to have improved the workability and acceptability of the Bill. Full and constructive debate led to a cross-party consensus on a number of issues, such as the need for an equalisation of the maximum penalties that can be imposed for the various offences under the Bill, and a return to the original definition in the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 of "public procession", which now makes it clear that it includes processions involving vehicles and other conveyances.

At this juncture, it is important to pay tribute to my noble Friend Lord Dubs who was responsible for the Bill in the other place. I also pay tribute to the Lords who spoke on behalf of the Ulster Unionist party, the Conservative party, the Alliance party and the Liberal Democrat party, all of whom made major contributions in reaching agreement in these important areas. The Bill is the better for their input. I hope that we can achieve the same level of co-operation in this House.

In recent years, a great deal has been asked of the Chief Constable and the Royal Ulster Constabulary in relation to disputed parades. They have shown equanimity, courage and determination in their attempts to resolve disputes and to manage the literally explosive situations that have arisen in recent years when an accommodation could not be found. All too often, they have, in my view, been expected to bear too much of the pressure. In recent years, Secretaries of State have also borne considerable pressure. It is not our intention simply to transfer that pressure solely to the Parades Commission.

The Bill therefore not only establishes a Parades Commission empowered to make determinations in relation to parades but enables the Secretary of State, on application by the Chief Constable, to review the determination made by the commission and to revoke, amend or confirm it after consulting the commission, where practical.

In reviewing the commission's decision, the Secretary of State will need to take all relevant factors into account—just like the commission—and not simply public order issues. Should all those attempts fail, on the day the RUC will continue to have the power to take action to deal with or prevent a breach of the peace.

The Secretary of State retains the power to ban public processions as currently set out in the order on public order.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): That brings us to the crux of the Bill. What if we are threatened with a Drumcree 4? What will the Secretary of State do then?

Mr. Ingram: That question takes me down the road of trying to predict what may happen in the summer. It will be a matter of fine judgment by the commission in the lead-up, by the Chief Constable in relation to his powers, and in respect of the powers that reside in the Secretary of State. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that it would be wrong to try to develop the scenario of recent years and say that there would then be a specific determination. That determination rests with those who are responsible at the point at which the determination is made. The nature of the Bill means that different people are empowered to carry out that determination.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I am sure that the Minister will be happy to tell the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) that the simple answer is that, in view of the relatively good outcome this summer, only one rational decision can be taken: not to assist the people who have caused the trouble by blocking the road in previous years. That is the only sensible way in which to proceed.

Mr. Ingram: We could spend a long time debating the best way forward if we could predict what the future holds. I hope that we do not reach the flashpoint of conflict or stand-off. Different circumstances applied each time in 1995, 1996 and 1997. It flows from that that it would be wrong to try to say that the same thing will inevitably occur next summer. I hope that we all do everything in our power to seek to ensure that it will not be repeated. That is why I started by commenting on the impact of Drumcree 1995. Remember what happened in 1996 and 1997: the mayhem and riots that ensued, and the damage that that did to the good name of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Godman: I am sorry to be a nuisance to my hon. Friend, but perhaps I misheard what he said earlier. Will he confirm that the Chief Constable will not have the power to overturn a determination by the commission? Will he, instead, in the appropriate circumstances, have to go to the Secretary of State to have a determination overturned?

Mr. Ingram: The Chief Constable will have the power under the public order legislation to decide, on the day, whether a parade should go ahead. The Secretary of State also has banning powers, as set out in the Bill, which are a straightforward transfer from the order on public order. Of course, the Secretary of State can revoke, amend or uphold a decision of the commission following a reference from the Chief Constable. There are a number of ways in which such matters can be examined. I hope that that answer helps my hon. Friend to understand the provisions relating to determinations.

All the relevant factors must be taken into account by the Secretary of State, just as the commission must take a range of relevant factors into account. A decision will not simply be reached on the grounds of public order.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): Can the Minister tell us whether members of the commission would be in attendance at a controversial parade to try to sort things out if something went wrong?

Mr. Ingram: It depends on the nature of the parade and what is happening round about it. We know that the commission is very much a hands-on one. It depends on the stage at which its members seek to participate—they may try to facilitate mediation or may adjudicate at a certain point. It would be wrong to speculate on whether the commission would be involved in particular parades. I know that commission members witnessed many parades last summer. If my memory serves me right, I understand that Alastair Graham was at Drumcree and obviously observed what happened. I do not know to what extent he continued to talk to people—that was a matter for him.

Mr. Forsythe: I am sorry to interrupt the Minister, but there is a considerable difference between observing a parade and trouble, and trying to do something about it.

Mr. Ingram: Absolutely. That is why I have said it depends on the point in a parade to which the hon. Gentleman's question refers. Well in advance of a parade there are obvious available points of engagement and discussion, where it is possible to facilitate mediation. At that stage, it is even possible that the commission could mediate, as the Bill empowers it to do.

On the day of a parade, should there be a major public disorder problem—let us hope that that does not occur—the Chief Constable must make a decision. I would assume that the Parades Commission would be in attendance to witness the events and to learn from that experience. I am sure that its members would talk to many people on that day and afterwards to learn why their attempts to seek accommodation had not proved successful. They would have to learn from that, in the hope of building on that experience when dealing with other parades that immediately followed or those that were held in the months and years ahead.

The approach that I have set out and powers in the Bill are recommended by the North report. We all hope that those powers would not need to be exercised. By their very nature, they are the powers of last resort. The best interests of the community are served not by exercising banning powers or by the Chief Constable exercising powers on the grounds of public order, but by both sides in a dispute engaging in a dialogue, through mediation if necessary, to seek an accommodation with which both can live.

We all hope that a new mood will prevail in Northern Ireland, fostered in an atmosphere of peace, where agreement is currently being sought by the parties taking part in the multi-party talks. We hope that that will encourage both sides to seek accommodation and to avoid conflict across the range of areas that have been disputatious in Northern Ireland in the past.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister referred to the political talks that are proceeding and the possibility—indeed, the

[Mr. Trimble]

hope that many people have—that those talks will produce an agreement. I am sure that he will agree that the most important issue facing Northern Ireland is that there is an agreement.

In the event of that agreement including matters that touch on the Bill, will the Minister give an undertaking that the Government will ensure that that is implemented and carried into legislation as quickly as possible? The Minister stood at the Dispatch Box on Monday night when we were discussing the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill and said that if the inter-party talks brought forward any matters that touched on the structures of the police, he would ensure that they were brought forward during the passage of that Bill. Will he give the same undertaking with regard to today's Bill? It is possible that the agreement of the inter-party talks could touch significantly on the Bill.

Mr. Ingram: I am being asked to speculate into the unknown—

Mr. Trimble: It is not unknown.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman should let me explain my point. If he is not happy with my explanation, he can come back to me, but he should let me explain in my way and not make his judgment before I have got more than two words out of my mouth.

The hon. Gentleman was asking me to speculate on what could come out of an agreement following the talks. Assuming that the current timetable is held to, the time scale could be May of next year. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, well in advance of that, we hope to have the Parades Commission up and functioning and to have the Bill on the statute book so that the commission can be properly constituted. We want it to be able to operate well in advance of the forthcoming marching season.

If anything by way of an agreement comes out of the joint talks and impinges on the Bill or any other piece of legislation, clearly the Government will have to take cognisance of that. If all the parties participating in the talks want something to happen which has the support of the people of Northern Ireland, it behoves the Government to take full account of that.

Mr. Trimble: The situation may arise in a slightly different way from that anticipated by the Minister. An agreement in the talks may be held up, or may not be achievable, without changes to the legislation. Should that situation arise, I hope that the Minister will act with the same promptness as he promised on Monday night with regard to the police legislation.

Mr. Ingram: Promptness in terms of my actions may be easy to deliver, but we have to consider the business of the House over which I do not have control and which is a matter for others.

All of us will be fully conscious of the importance of the hon. Gentleman's point—if there is a major point of contention and a lasting peaceful settlement could be held up on the basis of an amendment to a piece of legislation, I am sure that there will be urgent talks with all the constitutional parties to ascertain the best way forward. It depends on what sort of change is required; it may or may not require primary legislation; it may or may not require a significant amount of time in the House. We could speculate all evening on various scenarios, but I do not think that it would take the debate much further forward.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the Minister, particularly as he has given way three times on this point, which is unusual. When the Minister replied, there was a smile on his face as though he thought he was dealing with an unusual scenario. When the Minister considers that this Bill is the most serious and substantial assault on the civil rights of the people of Northern Ireland this century, he must realise that this is not a light matter.

In relation to the inter-party talks and the future of Northern Ireland, the issue is of major importance and it will be very much in the minds of those engaged in the talks. It is hypothetical because we may not arrive at an agreement during those talks, but I can assure the Minister that the matter will be considered in that context.

Mr. Ingram: That is helpful to know. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am not a participant in the talks proceedings, so I do not know whether the matter has been raised in any of the bilateral meetings or plenary sessions, but I shall certainly find out whether that is the case.

If the hon. Gentleman has a strong view on that matter and if he pursues it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my fellow Minister of State, who have direct responsibility in that area, I am sure that he will get an answer to a specific question rather than a hypothetical question. I suggest that, when trying to move forward the talks process, it is better that we deal with specifics, rather than with unspecified or hypothetical generalities.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has raised a point which is important to him and about which his community feels strongly. I have a question vis-a-vis my hon. Friend's remarks on the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill and other matters: if an agreement is contingent on alterations to the Bill, does the alteration take place before the agreement is agreed, or is the agreement going to be made subject to alterations in the Bill—that is, there will be no change in the status quo before the agreement is made and, if no agreement is made, the status quo has already been altered?

Mr. Ingram: This is becoming rather like a philosophy debate. I am not belittling it—I understand the depth of the point being raised—but we are dealing with the Second Reading of a Bill, and the Government are determined to proceed on course with the Bill. The eventualities that have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) are, in a sense, not yet on the table for discussion.

We can deal only with matters that exist and not with those that are hypothetical. If they become reality and affect the status quo or the proceedings of the Bill in Committee and on Report, those matters will have to be taken into account. However, they will not be taken into account because of pressure from one particular party or

an individual Member of Parliament. If I understand the hon. Member for Upper Bann correctly, they will arise from an agreed position that the House will be asked to consider. We can then proceed to give these matters our consideration at that stage.

Before those numerous interventions, I was setting out what all of us hope will prevail in Northern Ireland—a new future, fostered in an atmosphere of peace in which agreement can be reached. It is encouraging to hear the hon. Member for Upper Bann talking in those terms; all of us can take encouragement from that. He has made a major contribution throughout the talks process, and I know that he will continue to do so.

I hope that I have clearly set out the reasons why the Bill is needed. Last Saturday's events in Derry have shown that violent disturbances do not occur only at the height of the marching season, in the heat of summer; they can flare up wherever there are people intent on creating mayhem and riot and where there is an unwillingness to reach accommodation.

The use or the threat of force has been a blight on society in Northern Ireland for many years. The way in which the law has been structured to deal with disputes over parades has in recent years encouraged those who would use or threaten force. That is surely wrong. The rule of law must be paramount at all times.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): Further to that point, is the Minister aware that three of the leading spokesmen for the so-called residents groups—Dounacha MacNellis of the Bogside Residents Group, Brendan McKenna of the Garvachy Road Residents Coalition and Gerard Rice of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community—have convictions for terrorist offences? Does not that underline the reality that what the Minister describes as the "flaring up" of protests and opposition parades is actually carefully orchestrated by Sinn Fein-IRA? The evidence for that is the fact that those three leading spokesmen have all been convicted of IRA membership in the past.

Mr. Ingram: I dealt with that issue in some detail during Monday night's debate on the police legislation. I know that the hon. Gentleman was present for only part of that debate, so he might have missed the views I expressed then.

The debate is not well served by attributing blame to only one side. We must be realistic when dealing with the issues that we face in Northern Ireland. There are many players in the outbreaks of public disorder. That is what puts pressure on the Chief Constable; it is what has put pressure on previous Secretaries of State when coming to their determinations as to whether parades should or should not be allowed to proceed.

The rule of law must be paramount at all times. It is the bedrock of any civilised society. Those who seek to overturn the rule of law must be discouraged from doing so, and punished if they still proceed. The Bill is designed to aid those who seek to uphold the rule of law. It is designed to operate in a way that is fair and reasonable, and which embraces common sense. Those principles underlie everything the Government are trying to do in Northern Ireland. I hope that every Member of the House who values those principles will support us.

No law is perfect; no new structures are without problems or flaws. However, without the support of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, whatever legislation is enacted or whatever structures are built will just not work. Hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been dissipated over recent years in policing costs and clearing up the damage caused by those who do not respect the rule of law.

Of course, there is much more than direct public expenditure at stake—who knows how many investment opportunities and possibilities for economic growth have been forgone over that period? The cost of the events this weekend in Derry alone are already estimated to be in the region of £5 million. To that can be added the tens of millions of pounds spent in the aftermath of Drumcree 1995, 1996 and 1997.

The whole community pays the price; the whole community suffers. Thus, it is in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland, socially and economically, to see that disputes are resolved by accommodation, not conflict. I hope that the Bill will go some way to making that more possible in the future, and I commend it to the House.

4.36 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I thank the Minister for setting out the Government's objectives. As the Bill has been exhaustively debated in another place, and as a number of the Opposition's concerns have already been taken into account, I intend to keep my comments relatively brief. I should like, however, to record our thanks for the co-operative way in which the Minister in another place dealt with those concerns. I pay tribute, too, to my noble Friend Lord Cope for his efforts on behalf of the Opposition.

It is probably true to say that marches, and the so-called marching season, in Northern Ireland are one of the aspects of society there which the public in Great Britain find the most difficult to understand: they find the whole thing baffling. They watch with amazement marches commemorating events of 100, 200 or even 300 years ago. On the whole, they find the whole thing unnecessary and provocative.

Rarely do the people of Great Britain try to understand, in short, why their fellow countrymen in Northern Ireland see the necessity to march. That view is born of the luxury of security: we are secure in our ability to express our cultural traditions, secure in our national identity, and secure in our ultimate constitutional status.

The House cannot simply dismiss the marches in Northern Ireland, however. Above all, we have a duty to understand their significance to a great many people there. That is not just because of the contentious nature of some of the marches, or because a small minority of them are attended by public order problems—as witnessed in Londonderry last weekend. The reasons go much deeper than that, because to understand the numerous parades and processions that take place every year, and to understand why they do, is to come close to a proper understanding of the nature of the problems of Northern Ireland. I shall develop that point briefly.

Parades and processions provide us, in effect, with a microcosm of the historic struggle between Unionism and nationalism—not just over the past 28 years, during the current troubles, but over the centuries, ever since the titanic religious and constitutional struggles of the 17th century. They are about displays of identity. They are about defiance—a siege mentality on both sides,

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which has yet to be resolved. Above all, they are about territory—the mosaic of settlement—on what is described as the "narrow ground", which has done so much to forge the patterns of conflict that have characterised almost every stage of the so-called Ulster crisis.

When violence erupts, it is a reminder to us all of the real tensions and insecurities that are constantly there below the surface of society in Northern Ireland. Only when the ancient insecurities are lifted and a new accommodation between the two divisions in Northern Ireland has been forged, will the parades and processions take on the form that everyone in the House and elsewhere desires: displays of cultural traditions that can be respected, and even enjoyed, by all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. That is what the current talks process is all about, so we wish it well.

However, the immediate background to the Bill is one of the ugliest manifestations of the divisions in Northern Ireland: the violently disputed march, every July, at Drumcree in the constituency of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), and the subsequent stand-off and violence.

Drumcree is only an example of the increasing number of disputed parades throughout the Province. There are several others. The Orange and Black Preceptory parades on the Ormeau road in Belfast, the Apprentice Boys annual parade in Derry and the Orange parade in Magherafelt in County Tyrone are a few examples.

However, undoubtedly Drumcree has encapsulated the difficulties of the parades issue. Drumcree was the catalyst for the previous Conservative Government to establish the North review, to consider the issue of parades in Northern Ireland and to recommend ways in which they might be handled in future. I should like to place on the record once again our gratitude to the North review and to associate the official Opposition with the broad thrust of its conclusions.

Two principles guided our approach to the issue of parades when we were in government, and they continue to guide us now. First, let me be unequivocal. The official Opposition support the rights of organisations to hold parades in Northern Ireland. On both sides of the community, they are perfectly legitimate, not to say colourful, means of cultural expression. They are, within the law, an integral part of a free society.

Let no one forget that the vast majority of marches in Northern Ireland pass off peacefully. In many cases, they date back centuries. The Orange Order has been around since 1795, the Apprentice Boys since the 1820s. The Ancient Order of Hibernians has a lengthy history.

Many of the marches have been held along the same routes since the organisations were founded. However, in some cases the demography of the routes that have been marched has changed considerably, not least in the past 20 years and as a result of the troubles.

For example, 20 years ago the Lower Ormeau road was predominantly Protestant. It is now a very strongly republican area yet, not unnaturally, the Orange Order wishes to continue to parade along the route that it regards as traditional. That presents us with very difficult problems and the potential for public disorder.

Rev. Martin Smyth: As the hon. Gentleman mentioned my constituency, I felt that I should comment. He may have made a slip of the tongue when he spoke about a disputed parade in Magherafelt in County Tyrone. I think it would have been Bellaghy in County Londonderry, because I am not aware of Magherafelt being in County Tyrone.

Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that it is not a question of simply retaining a traditional route on the Ormeau road? It is the main route on which people walk, day in, day out, to their business places, and it links Ballynafeigh and Donegall Pass, which are two Protestant areas.

Mr. MacKay: I confirm that and I apologise to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) for the slip of the tongue in saying Tyrone, not Londonderry. I am grateful.

Coupled with the right to march are the rights of residents of a different tradition who object—sometimes violently—to what they regard as triumphalism and intimidation or, in effect, an invasion of territory that they regard as their own.

I understand the suspicion of some hon. Members—especially from Northern Ireland—about the nature of many of the residents associations that seem to have proliferated in recent years and the fact that many of them appear to be manipulated by Sinn Fein-IRA, as the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) well illustrated in an intervention, but residents' rights must be respected.

Today we are trying to strike a balance between those two elements: the right to march and the rights of residents, which are at the heart of the struggle at Drumcree. They are at the heart of the Bill.

If parades are a microcosm of the problems in Northern Ireland, Drumcree is a microcosm of the parades issue. For the best part of two centuries, the Orange Order has sought to walk from the Protestant church at Drumcree along a route that takes it along the Garvaghy road, through a strongly republican area. As the Minister said, in each of the past three years the marchers have been resisted by violent protesters. Serious breaches of the peace, including loss of life, have probably been averted only by the resolution of the security forces. I utterly condemn those who have resorted to violence or broken the law on such occasions.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, as has been said, the Garvaghy road and the Ormeau road are not roads passing through residential areas, but main arterial roads? Is he further aware that there is little, if any, evidence that parades passing those points in approximately 20 minutes annually are likely to give rise to any reasonable cause of fear, threat or intimidation to residents adjoining those main arterial routes?

Mr. MacKay: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that they adjoin. I do not want to go into details; I believe that the Minister was correct in saying that that would not be helpful this afternoon. In the case of the Garvaghy road, that main road passes down one side of a nationalist housing estate and causes offence; that is beyond dispute. Whether that should be of overwhelming

influence is entirely another matter and no doubt an argument that the hon. and learned Gentleman will wish to develop in his speech.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Trimble *rose—*

Mr. MacKay: I give way to the hon. Gentleman whose constituency I am talking about at some length.

Mr. Trimble: Something has always fascinated me about the Drumcree church parade and its return down the main road into Portadown. As has been said, along the Garvaghy road, the estates are set back some distance from the road, but along the Drumcree road before its junction with the Garvaghy road, the estate borders the road, and there has never been trouble at that point. There has never, to my knowledge, on the five occasions on which I have walked there, been any sign of residents being annoyed or upset by the parade there, but on turning the corner into the Garvaghy road, one finds that people have come out of the estates and congregated at points some distance from the housing, for the purpose of trying to attack those who are walking home from church. The geography is more complex, but I draw attention to the fact that there are no protests at the point where the estate borders the route that is walked.

Mr. MacKay: That was an extremely important and helpful intervention. I, and I hope other hon. Members, will not want to second-guess the hon. Gentleman on the geography of his constituency, and will want to take careful note of his first-hand observations of marches over a number of years. He might wish to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to pursue those matters further in due course.

I return to the subject of the violence. I repeat that the Opposition, and I am sure the Government, utterly condemn those who have resorted to violence or who break the law on such occasions. In many cases, the violence has been premeditated and very carefully orchestrated. I pay tribute to those who have sought to defuse community tensions at marches throughout Northern Ireland and who have been prepared to compromise, particularly last summer.

I commend the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supported by the Army, on the professionalism and impartiality that they displayed at Drumcree in the face of appalling provocation from both sides. I agree with the Chief Constable of the RUC, who complained that, year after year, the RUC has been put in the middle, which is an impossible situation for the police force. The RUC has endured much unjustified criticism of how the parade at Drumcree and other parades throughout Northern Ireland have been policed. On behalf of the Opposition, I reject that criticism entirely. The Chief Constable had to make difficult judgments on the ground in an unbelievably tense situation. It does not behove Members of Parliament, particularly those whose constituencies the marches do not go through, to second-guess the Chief Constable, whose main duty is to maintain law and order and to minimise the risk of loss of life.

In Londonderry last week, we saw the position in which the police have continually found themselves. The RUC deserves not our condemnation but our whole-hearted support. I agree that the RUC, especially the Chief Constable, has been placed in a no-win situation. Whatever he does or decides, he will be criticised by one side or the other, which is one reason why I believe that this legislation is necessary.

The struggle at Drumcree has gone down in folklore on both sides. One of the Bill's key objectives is to avoid confrontation at that parade and at others throughout Northern Ireland in the future. We support that, as we do the establishment of the Parades Commission. We wish Alastair Graham and his team well in their efforts to reach peaceful resolutions, on the basis of consensus, to the difficulties that might arise. We do not underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead. The Opposition recognise that some of the Parades Commission's adjudications will be controversial and might go against the wishes of one side or the other. However, I hope that all parties and all sections of the community will approach its work in a constructive and co-operative manner.

When the Government introduced the Bill, we had many concerns, which were widely shared in the other place. A number of them have now been satisfactorily resolved. The Government agreed to strike out one of the main clauses—clause 3—rewrite six of the other 18 clauses and two of the three schedules, and alter the short and long titles. I shall not rehearse again the arguments that were used in the other place other than to comment in passing on the remarkable degree of consensus there. That was particularly the case on clause 3, which has now been struck out of the Bill, together with all references to it. We very much welcome that.

In its original form, clause 3 would have enabled the commission to consider all kinds of outdoor expressions of cultural identity, such as church services and gable ends, although not offensive sporting occasions. Now the Bill deals only with processions such as parades and protests, which is how it should be. As my noble Friend Lord Cope said in another place, the Secretary of State's powers to ban parades and protests are not made any easier by the Bill, as the threshold has been increased to "serious public disorder" and "serious damage to property".

The penalties for parade organisers when parades go wrong are no longer four times as much as for those who set out to break up parades. The same penalties will be available for organisers of, or participants in, an illegal parade held without notice as are available for the organisers of, or participants in, a legal parade that goes wrong in some way. Previously, the penalties were much stiffer for legal parade organisers and participants, which cannot be what the Minister intended.

The Government will also use the old definition of processions, which includes cavalcades of cars or vehicle processions.

In short, we now have a much fairer and more balanced Bill, which is likely to be more effective and, although it does not provide all the answers to the parades issue, it is workable. Importantly, the Bill as now constituted is not the anti-parades Bill demanded by some, which is not to say that the Opposition parties will not want to look closely at the detail in Committee to see whether there is scope for establishing common ground, to improve the Bill still further. As it stands, however, and as a result of the changes already accepted by the Government, we intend to give the Bill an unopposed Second Reading.

4.54 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): The Bill is a sad reflection of the inability of communities in Northern Ireland to come to terms with and accept the diversity of political, cultural and religious beliefs and aspirations. The Bill and other Bills of this nature are a poor substitute for the good will and tolerance that should exist in any community. People should not only accept the differences and diversity that exist within communities but desist from acts that infringe the rights and even the sensitivities of others. If true tolerance existed, the confrontational problems in Northern Ireland could and would be resolved locally and amicably. The problem would not have to be addressed by a Bill which, even with the best will in the world, is a blunt and clumsy instrument to deal with the failure of human relationships.

Many people will argue and try to convince us that all Orange parades, Black Preceptory parades and Apprentice Boys parades are mere expressions of religious culture. Indeed, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) said that they were expressions of political and other beliefs, rather than simply religious, as we are led to believe. If the parades are somehow rooted in customary practice, they should be sacrosanct and inviolable, irrespective of the harm that some of them do to the community in terms of injury to people, destruction of property and damage to the reputation of Northern Ireland as a whole.

Many parades are genuine in terms of their truly religious and otherwise innocent intent, but it must be said that some specific parades, while under the guise of religious occasions, are based totally on a display and assertion of dominance, superiority and subjugation. Primary among those must be the infamous parades at Drumcree in the past three years.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman claims that the walk to and from Drumcree parish church is for the purpose of intimidating people. I am sure that he is aware that the parade started in 1807, and until the last couple of decades, on its journey back into Portadown along the Garvaghy road, it did not pass by the housing of any person who would be upset by it. If the hon. Gentleman suggests that that church procession is for the purpose of intimidation, what on earth was happening from 1807 until just a couple of decades ago?

Mr. McGrady: The hon. Gentleman, who is leader of the Ulster Unionist party, would have us believe that the Drumcree march is simply an expression of religious belief. In his earlier intervention on the hon. Member for Bracknell, he said that the local community lived some distance from the Garvaghy road, which would lead the House to believe that it was miles from the scene of events. Yet on the last occasion, because the march passed down the Garvaghy road, the people on that street could not attend their place of worship and had to perform that religious act of worship in the open air. So much for the lack of proximity.

If the parade is truly a religious expression, the backdrop to it is anything but religious. Bulldozers were brought along and other unmentioned and unprovable events took place behind the scenes, threatening not only public order but the life and limb of entire communities. That is what we are dealing with. If it was genuinely religious and not an expression of dominance and subjugation, why could not that march to Drumcree church, which was so graphically described by the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, have returned by the same route, without any hindrance? The alternative route by which the marchers came was available for them to go back. No amount of tradition—10, 50 or 200 years—can justify the expression of that so-called right at the expense of the consequences that follow.

The decision to allow the Orange parade to march along the Garvaghy road was wrong in principle, and in terms of justice, law and order. No statement from the Secretary of State or the Chief Constable can justify that decision. By his own declaration at the time, to which the Minister referred in his introduction to the debate, the Chief Constable was saying that law enforcement could be based only on the principle of submission to the greater evil. The evil to which he was referring was that of the loyalist and Orange violence against the nationalist community at Garvaghy road.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the confrontations at Drumcree of which he complains were really occasioned by protests against a lawful parade? It was the threat of intercommunity violence, not least by members of the nationalist community, that caused the interface in which the Chief Constable was placed in the odious position in which he found himself. To suggest that it was solely the responsibility of those who chose to parade along a route that they had taken for 200 years is a gross misrepresentation of the facts.

Mr. McGrady: I cannot say that I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his intervention, but I shall deal with the facts that he has given. Let me put the situation to the House in a different context. If the march is not a triumphalist and subjugatory expression, why are medals struck in the subsequent couple of months each year to commemorate the event—to commemorate the daring and courage of those who march down the Garvaghy road? For all I know, a bar could have been struck for the medal last summer. Is that an expression of religious tolerance? The facts are different. The intent was to intimidate, and intimidation took place.

I referred to the Chief Constable saying that law enforcement must be based on the principle of submission to the greater evil. The Chief Constable specifically sent the security forces into the estates on the Garvaghy road to confine members of the nationalist community. That decision was based on the distorted argument that, as he said, he was protecting their lives from the greater evil—his words, not mine. The Secretary of State fully endorsed that decision, and added the abysmally weak rider that she hoped that as a consequence the Orange Order would be "generous".

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McGrady: I have given way quite enough; I want to get on.

Inexperience may be an excuse, but lack of principle in high position is never an excuse. The Secretary of State and the forces of law and order were not capable on those

occasions—July 1995, 1996 and 1997—of upholding and enforcing the rule of law or the principles of justice and equity. The subsequent debate has been clouded by the argument that it was a religious march and that the marchers were prevented from coming back from their church. I have already argued in response to a question that if community harmony, religious freedom and so on were at the heart of decision making, the parade could have returned without incident by the way that it had come to its church.

Mr. Ingram: I appreciate the depth of feeling on the matter. If the decision had been taken to ban that parade, what is the hon. Gentleman's assessment of the potential state of public order thereafter? That is the judgment that the Chief Constable had to make, and that is why he used the language that he used. Did the hon. Gentleman want to see something worse visited on Northern Ireland?

Mr. McGrady: I thank the Minister for his intervention. Is he offering the same justification as the Chief Constable, that the greater evil is that which should prevail? That is the import of the hon. Gentleman's question. The answer to the question, "What would happen if" or, "What would happen if not" should be based on the common principles of law, justice and equality, rather than on who can mount the bigger force or threaten more violence.

As other speakers have said, we must not play into the hands of those who orchestrate violence in the pretence of making a protest—the so-called defenders of the nationalist communities, who simply perpetrate their violence also on the nationalist communities. There are some genuine community groups that are anxious to alleviate the problem and eradicate dissension, but there are other groups that are dominated by other agencies determined to exacerbate the violence and mayhem that occur. I hope that in future all those in the nationalist community will carefully consider their actions and not allow themselves to be used by the paramilitaries in that hypocritical and cynical way.

Last week's events in Derry, which could be perceived as a precursor of today's debate, illustrate the enormity of the potential for a parade to destroy all the work that has been done to create a settled political climate, a more attractive economic environment and a better way of life. One afternoon's work, and it is all gone.

We are tired in Northern Ireland. We are weary of events, and we are also very angry at the fact that in Derry, two relatively small sections of a large and tolerant community can bring such mayhem, destruction and economic damage to a great city within a few hours.

In the six months from 1 April to 30 September this year, there were 2,687 parades in Northern Ireland. According to a parliamentary answer, it was judged that 2,401 of them were Orange and Unionist parades, and 286 were nationalist parades. Although it must be acknowledged that few of those parades give rise to problems, the sheer weight of repetition in every community of parade after parade exacerbates the position.

Two factors could considerably alleviate the problem arising from the excess of parading. One is the voluntary restriction of the number of occasions on which marches are held. The second is the expression of greater tolerance by the communities towards those who wish to march for whatever reason—religious or traditional—as long as it is innocent in intent. I think that the Bill attempts to address that point.

I am not sure that now is the appropriate time to discuss the details of the Bill, but I wish to comment on some broad aspects of the legislation at this early stage. I shall do so not according to their importance but according to their sequential appearance in the Bill. I am concerned about clause 2(2)(a), which gives the commission power to mediate between parties. That clause is particularly worrying when one takes account of the power in clause 2(2)(b), which requires the commission to issue determinations in respect of parades.

I suggest that it is not good practice for a body that is engaged in mediation to make decisions about parades also. The commission should certainly assist and facilitate mediation, but I do not believe that it should make determinations. I fear that that would compromise the commission's role and might lead to unnecessary confusion, unwarranted allegations and a diminution of regard for any final determination regarding a parade.

A theme seems to run through clause 3, which deals with the code of conduct, clause 6, which deals with advance notice of parades, and other parts of the Bill. I shall refer to that specifically on another occasion. However, in almost every circumstance—whether it be determination of a parade, the conditions for a parade, the registration of bands or offences for interrupting parades—the Bill allows for power to filter back eventually to the Secretary of State or through the Chief Constable to the Secretary of State. As I said this morning, it looks as if one is keeping a dog and barking oneself.

I thought that the Bill would provide for a commission that would take out of the political-security arena the decision making regarding parades. However, it seems to keep introducing that power into controversial areas. Almost every part of the Bill, including clauses 3 and 6, goes into some detail about referring power back to the Secretary of State.

Clause 7(6)(e) refers to a matter that the commission must consider when determining whether a parade should go ahead and under what conditions. The clause refers to

"the desirability of allowing a procession customarily held along a particular route to be held along that route."

The vexing question of traditionality has been raised in the debate. I have an anecdote about my experience of traditionality. There were some problems with a small parade that was held in an area not far from my constituency—I shall not name it, as that would only exacerbate the situation. The parade caused some offence and residents went to the police to request assistance. The police said that they could not do anything about it, because it was a traditional parade.

One would imagine that a traditional parade had some tradition. However, this parade took place on a new housing estate along a hammerhead cul-de-sac 150 yd long. It was a green-field site two years ago and there was no proper road, but the police allowed the parade to go ahead on the basis of traditionality. It devalues the concept of traditionality to allow parades to take place in local areas such as that.

I thought that the underlying purpose of the Bill was to take away from the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable the decisions regarding parades and the

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conditions attached thereto, yet every part of the Bill inexplicably pushes the problem back to them—I was looking forward to a more positive and dynamic new dimension.

I have highlighted several concerns that large sections of the community in the north of Ireland have about some of the details of the proposed legislation. I hope that, in his winding-up speech, the Minister will address my concerns about referral of powers to the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable and the suggestion about bringing the Police Authority on to the scene at some stage. Perhaps the Government will amend the Bill in Committee.

It is important that we end the conflict about parades in Northern Ireland once and for all. I hope that the draft Bill will establish a really independent Parades Commission with determining powers on a statutory basis, in line with the North review. That would provide a possible vehicle for ending the bitter conflict that we have witnessed over so many years. On behalf of my party and all of those whom it represents, I wish the commission well in its very difficult task. I hope that that task will be made easier by the support and understanding that it will receive from the entire Northern Ireland community. My party supports the Bill.

5.15 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): This is a very important Bill and a very important debate—I am only sorry that so few hon. Members are in the Chamber to listen to and participate in it. That is partially the fault of those who scheduled the debate for a Thursday night just before Christmas—it should have been considered earlier in the week.

Some of the Minister's opening remarks made me wonder exactly what he thinks is going on in Northern Ireland. I was particularly interested in his comment that many players are involved in parades. Perhaps he will tell us how many players were involved on Saturday and what interests they were pursuing. As he is clearly aware of the personalities and the backgrounds of the different players involved, he must have inquired of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as to who was protesting against, and participating in, the parades.

There were certainly enough photographs taken and enough video cameras in the hands of the police and the security forces to allow identification of every known IRA player, terrorist, ex-terrorist, ex-thug and ex-murderer who has served a prison sentence and who was present on the streets of Dungiven, Bellaghy, Londonderry and many other places. Harryville had nothing to do with a parade: it was a protest outside a church—which I think that every hon. Member on the Unionist Benches would object to because we do not see what good it will do anyone.

As the Minister obviously knows the IRA and Sinn Fein-related persons who were involved in those protests, will he give their names to the House or publish a list? I think that many people would be interested in that information. The Minister could publish their photographs if he has not managed to identify them. We shall get them identified because we know who those individuals are, and we know that some of them travel 30 or 40 miles to be intimidated and insulted at such gatherings.

It is interesting that the Minister refused to give way to me on the question of history. I thought that every hon. Member would acknowledge that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it endlessly. Yet a Minister of the Crown stood before us today saying, "No, no, no. I don't want to know where we have come from and I don't want to know how we got here." That seems to be a peculiar way for any Minister to proceed.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) cited some statistics today. I must confess that I have been trying to collect detailed statistics on parades and processions for some years—and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have received mighty little help from the police or anyone else.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It is sometimes confusing if two hon. Members seek to intervene at the same time. I ask the hon. Gentleman to make it clear to which hon. Gentleman he wishes to give way.

Mr. Ross: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does my hon. Friend accept that, of the 2,000 parades to which he has referred, about 400 or 500 are recorded on 12 July, and that they are duplicated in that one in the morning and one in the evening are counted as separate parades? It is exceedingly difficult to obtain accurate details from the authorities.

Mr. Ross: That is the very point that I was making.

I was given global figures for Northern Ireland. I attempted to ascertain the position in the police division which I represent for 1996. I discovered that, in that year, there were 267 parades that were tagged as loyalist, along with 34 of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which was roughly 10 per cent. of the total. The Sinn Fein republicans' parades represented about 8 per cent. I assume that those parades were those of which the police were given due and timely notice. The Royal British Legion had 25, as did the youth organisations.

I was astonished that youth organisations such as the Boys Brigade, the Girls Brigade, the Scout movement and other bodies, to name only the Protestant youth organisations, were able to reach a total of only 25. I thought that there was something wrong with the police statistics. I am sure that there are more than 25 such organisations.

The various loyalist organisations reach a considerable total but it is not one that represents an overwhelming number of loyalist parades every day of the week, especially when many of the so-called Orange parades are merely band collection expeditions round the country. Those parades must amount to a large proportion of the total that we are discussing.

It is necessary to understand the background to the parades and that which is being labelled as a parade, which are somewhat different concepts. With that understanding, a different picture begins to emerge.

Given that I found it difficult to obtain accurate statistics, I asked the police for a more detailed breakdown. I was told in February that a new statistical

system, which would be able to provide a more detailed set of statistics, had been implemented from the beginning of 1997.

As it happens, I tabled a parliamentary question at the end of July. I discovered from the answer that, until then, while there had been 1,576 loyalist parades and 254 others, only 114 nationalist parades took place. The hon. Member for South Down will appreciate that that was before 15 August, when a large proportion of the nationalist parades take place.

Mr. McGrady: The figures that I quoted were those that were cited in response to my parliamentary question, which was answered on 14 November. The figures related to a period from 1 April 1997 to 30 September 1997.

Mr. Ross: Yes, I read the question and the answer. The Minister received a letter from me in November in which I asked for a breakdown of the statistics. I hope that, sooner or later, he will be able to provide an answer, setting out what parades took place and what they were about. Were they church parades or collection parades? What were they? We must be aware of the detailed facts, because the devil is in the detail. We must have that information if we are fully to understand the situation.

A lack of understanding is common on the part of those who are trying to ascertain the detail of what is going on in Northern Ireland. I recall clearly that, in 1985, shortly after the then Prime Minister signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Baroness Thatcher, as she now is, said that she had signed it because something had to be done to stop the violence. Those words revealed a great void in her understanding of what was going on in Northern Ireland. That void remains unfilled to this day.

Lack of understanding is perhaps a true cause of violence in Northern Ireland. Such understanding is blocked by a well-fertilised and impregnable hedge of misdirection and political malice, often created by the IRA's propaganda machine, helped by its fellow travellers on the road to the all-Ireland republic that they desire.

The school of thought that produced the idea that something had to be done, without thinking through what that something should be—the reaction in 1985—is probably that which produced the foolish and ultimately dangerous Bill that we are discussing. I believe that the Bill will fail as the party procession legislation of the previous century failed.

Mr. Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is for the parties on both sides of the divide to establish whether the intent behind the Bill will be successful?

Mr. Ross: I shall detail the reasons why I take the view that I do before I conclude my speech. I ask the hon. Gentleman to restrain himself. I am aware that he has some knowledge of Northern Ireland, having grown up there. When I have finished, I think that he will understand the process of thought that has led me to my conclusions.

It is a plain fact that IRA-Sinn Fein and their spiritual predecessors of whatever name have long hated every manifestation of the desire of the Unionist population in Northern Ireland to remain within this realm, governed as it is by a constitutional monarchy and Parliament. Their desire is for a republican form of government. I do not know whether those on the Government Front Bench share that view but, given that those who occupy it have taken the oath or affirmation, I feel certain that they support the principle of constitutional monarchy.

One of the most visible and potent symbols of the desire to remain within the kingdom has been the Orange order and its sister organisations, the Royal Black Institution and the Apprentice Boys. They were, and are, visible because their members and halls are present in almost every town, village and hamlet in Northern Ireland. As well, their major celebrations are large and colourful occasions.

Those organisations are potent because their membership is large and much of it is active in the religious and political life of Northern Ireland. They are well recognised by Irish republicans as a bulwark of the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. These republican organisations well understand that, if the loyalist orders could be destroyed, or at least weakened, one of the strongest webs which unites the Ulster Protestant population would be greatly diminished. If so, the cohesion and strength of the Unionist position would be correspondingly reduced.

As that is so, the Ulster Protestant loyalist orders have long been a prime target for attack by violent republicanism, and non-violent republicanism tags cheerfully along because it shares the constitutional objectives of the gunmen and the bombers.

People outside Northern Ireland do not know those things. They see only a group of people who want to go where others, claiming to be either residents, or representatives of the residents, do not want them. Most people in Great Britain cannot understand the underlying, carefully concealed purpose of the objectors and believe that the stated purpose is the real one.

Sadly, some folk also believe the atrocious lie that the objections are spontaneous despite the fact that the leader of Sinn Fein, Mr. Adams, told his supporters that the preparations for the current confrontations took two years. It is only when we focus on the whole scene and place it in the context of the IRA assault on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland that events make sense. The long-term strategy set out by the IRA before violence was exploded in the late 1960s was that the campaign had to be a perfect blend of politics and violence.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, after the first IRA ceasefire on 31 August 1994, when the overt use of the bomb and the gun stopped, the IRA deliberately opened a second front, which consisted of civil unrest, attacks on parades and the spreading of violence among the community at large? As the hon. Gentleman has said, that has been publicly acknowledged by Mr. Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Fein-IRA, who has stated that that process did not happen accidentally but was the result of careful preparation over a period of years.

Mr. Ross: That is the very point that I was trying to make, at somewhat lesser length than the hon. and learned Gentleman. I hope that he will expand on what he has just said if he is able to speak later in the debate.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Does he also agree that, alongside that, there has been a sustained campaign over the years to attempt to burn out every Orange hall in the country?

Mr. Ross: I recall going to the General Synod of my church in May this year, when a great deal of hot air

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was being expended on the attacks on Catholic churches, and on the foolish behaviour such as that in Harryville. I was able to point out that the statistics that I had compiled on those incidents show that the vast majority of the buildings that were suffering arson and bomb damage were Protestant owned, and that a large proportion—at least two thirds—of the churches that had suffered damage by bomb and arson were Protestant churches.

In the 1960s, at first violence took centre stage. Politics publicly reared its head only on rare occasions, for example, when the IRA leadership was let out of prison and flown to London for consultations with the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, now Lord Whitelaw. The political element next appeared with the articulation of the Armalite and ballot box strategy, which eventually led to the ceasefires, as part of the progression of that strategy.

I should point out how careful the IRA has always been in the words that it uses, for the term "complete cessation of military operations"—that gets at what the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) was saying—does not imply that it is the end of what it calls its war against the British state. It was—and is—only a change of tactics within its broad strategy. It knew that its efforts to stop the processions would be resisted and create a volatile situation that would be certain to end in violence, and, of course, it was prepared to help that along with its organisation throughout the Province. The statistics of the burnings—the arson, the attacks on vehicles and so on—show that the number of incidents was always much, much higher in the areas with a high population of republicans and nationalists than it was in Protestant areas. Those statistics are available for anyone who wants them.

Violence—any violence—is very damaging to Northern Ireland, and therefore is very much welcomed by those who are determined to end the existence of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. In that context, I invite the House to look again at the events that took place in Londonderry last Saturday, and, indeed, at the problem that the Bill purports to resolve. That particular Apprentice Boys function goes back, I understand, to 1718—the first recorded occasion of the burning of Lundy—predating the formation of the Orange Order. It is probably the oldest such demonstration in Ireland. It is also a fact that, at one time, there were many similar commemorations in other towns and villages, which now survive in only a few locations, for example, Limavady, in my constituency, where the demonstration goes back a very long way; in Omagh, where I think it still takes place; and in Belfast, which is a relatively new demonstration.

The closest parallel to this type of behaviour in Great Britain is the burning of Guy Fawkes in Lewes and a number of other places in Sussex. It is quite evident from what we have seen on our television screens that the violence in Londonderry was carefully planned. The police knew beforehand that there would be a riot and took precautions. They were then accused of a heavy-handed presence. We even had Mr. McGuinness—not the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), but the leader of Sinn Fein-IRA—in Londonderry saying that some would go considerably further than that. We heard him saying, "It doesn't really take these lads very long to fill up a thousand petrol bombs." I have worked it out. It is nearly 400 gallons of petrol, at a pint a bottle. Who paid for the petrol? Where did they get it from? Did they just stop a tanker? It is not done in five minutes. It is not planned in five minutes. I do not think that printers or painters work on Saturday mornings, yet there was a big banner hanging over the Richmond centre, which the rioters had managed to invade, attacking the RUC. The police knew that there was going to be a riot, and they knew who was behind it.

The violence that erupted in Londonderry last Saturday spread over most of the old commercial heart of the city. It was not confined to the very small area in which the parade was taking place. The parade through that part of the city would normally be over in about 20 or 25 minutes. The riot was not only vicious and sustained. It was very carefully directed at a number of carefully chosen targets, one of which was the Government, who were being sent a plain message about the capability of IRA-Sinn Fein to switch on the violence when they wish. There were also a number of subtexts about the Government's slowness to create the united Ireland that the IRA wants; the meeting with the Prime Minister and Sinn Fein last week; and IRA members in prison and what would be done for them. I notice that nine of them got out in the Irish Republic today.

The second target was the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The banner displayed read, "Disband the RUC". The chants were not anti-Apprentice Boys. They were "SSRUC, SSRUC". There was an underlying demand for the police to stop all demonstrations by the loyal orders, or else, especially in the west bank in Londonderry.

The third target was a message that was sent to the local business community: "Exert pressure to stop all demonstrations by those dedicated to the Union in this city or you will suffer." Finally, of course, there were the Apprentice Boys, who were being told that they would be allowed to do only what Sinn Fein-IRA would permit. That is a common theme throughout the affair, right across the country.

Mr. Trimble: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I think that he has left a further target off his list, and a further objective that Sinn Fein-IRA had in organising the riot in Londonderry at the weekend—the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and his party. The hon. Member for Foyle had contributed significantly to the peaceful resolution of earlier difficulties about different parades in Londonderry, so Sinn Fein-IRA decided to create a problem, which had not been a problem hitherto, and to ensure that it was not resolved peacefully in order to damage the SDLP and its representative.

Mr. Ross: I was going to draw a gentle veil over the hurt and damage done to the SDLP and principally to its leader. I was at a gathering at which he was present the day before, and at that time he was very upbeat about the possibility of the problems being resolved. His face was very much shoved into the mud by the IRA and the way in which it behaved in that city on that occasion.

What is the end result of this? It is, of course, to get the Government, the police and the business community united yet again in their demand that the loyal orders talk directly to the IRA. We heard the same theme in the

opening speeches of today's debate. It runs through the proposed legislation from beginning to end. It runs through all the events leading up to it. It is a consequence of not understanding that this aspect of the multi-faceted reign of terror that we have lived with is but a tactic in one battle in a terrorist war to remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom.

When Ministers point us in that direction, whether they know it or not, they are informing Sinn Fein-IRA that the Government are relinquishing control of the streets to the terrorists' demands. I know that the Government will deny that—they always do—but I have set out the practical working out of following the path laid out in the Bill. If only the Government would look with care at the real reason for the terrorist assault, they would see that it is all about sovereignty over the territory of Northern Ireland. It is not about rights. It is not about jobs. It is not about parades or religion. It is about which nation governs and controls the six counties of Northern Ireland.

It is for that reason that the noble Lord Fitt was wrong when, referring to the 1966 riots in the Falls road, he described the Irish tricolour as a cultural symbol of the individual who was displaying it. It is not a cultural symbol in that context. It is a national flag and it is flown by republicans in Northern Ireland as a territorial claim—a fact to which members of both Front-Bench teams have consistently and assiduously closed their eyes.

This, I say again, is foolish and dangerous legislation. It is built upon deceiving words and the misconceptions taken up by Governments—this one and previous ones—as truth. It creates another factory of grievances in Northern Ireland. It will cause far greater mischief than at present exists in the whole area.

I have to tell the Government plainly that there are not just a few contentious parades. There are as many contentious parades as the IRA wants to create, and it will create as many, in as many places, as suits its purpose at a given time in a given year.

The best, perhaps the only solution—I put it in the broadest terms—is to put all existing processions through and look with care at new creations. If the Government do so with firmness, in a few years they will have created a situation in which processions will again be able to proceed in peace. In contrast, the Bill can ensure only that the number of violent incidents will increase year by year.

I have sat for longer than anyone else from Northern Ireland on the Unionist Benches, and I have lived in Northern Ireland all my life. The first contentious parade that I saw was on coronation day in 1953 in Dungiven when the IRA took over a large chunk of that town and set up its field kitchens to feed its followers and pressurise the local Roman Catholic population into supporting it, all because a local band was to lead the children in their fancy dress parade. I was 17 at the time. When I speak in the House on these matters, I speak with a background of knowledge and a depth of experience that no one on either Front Bench can even begin to comprehend, never mind match.

5.41 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in the debate. I follow the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) by saying that it is important that all hon. Members, particularly new Members, should comprehend and understand the situation in Northern Ireland. It is perhaps unusual for a London Member of Parliament to speak in such a debate, but some 600,000 Londoners are of Irish descent. According to the 1990–91 census, 214,000 were born in the Republic of Ireland and 42,000 in Northern Ireland.

My second reason for wishing to speak in the debate is that I was privileged to serve on an all-party group which visited Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland last week to understand—to use the phrase of the hon. Member for East Londonderry—Northern Ireland's multi-faceted society. I particularly thank all those whom we met in our attempt to understand the background to the talks process. We met politicians, RUC representatives, business people, people from the community and representatives of civil society.

In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), and the Secretary of State, who helped to set up the arrangements. We had an interesting stop-over in an excellent fast-food restaurant in Newry on the way from Belfast down to Dublin.

It is important to reflect that the work that we were learning about was cross-party, going back to previous Governments. I pay tribute to the work of Sir Patrick Mayhew, the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. All hon. Members should understand and comprehend the situation in Northern Ireland. Autumn 1997 in the House has been dominated by Northern Ireland, and rightly so. It is the key issue of the hour. The issues that we debate were referred to by the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram)—fairness, justice and equality.

Five measures have emerged during the past few months. First, the employment equality review of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights was completed this summer and made more than 160 recommendations. I look forward to the full paper in the new year, as I am sure do other hon. Members.

Secondly, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill was fully debated into the early hours of the morning in Committee and, as a member of that Committee, I started to comprehend Northern Ireland's multi-faceted society.

Thirdly, the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill, which received its Second Reading earlier this week, will improve the effectiveness and accountability of the police in Northern Ireland.

Fourthly, a White Paper has been published on the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom law. For the first time, that establishes fundamental human rights guarantees for all people in Northern Ireland and Britain.

The fifth measure is the Bill that we are debating today, which encourages accommodation over disputed parades and, where that fails, empowers an independent commission to determine whether and how a parade should go ahead. That follows the recommendations of the North report.

I pay tribute to the work done by my noble Friend Lord Dubs, with other Members of the other place, in achieving a consensus, certainly between the Opposition and the

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Government, although we have heard this evening that that consensus did not extend to all parties. The removal of clause 3, the equalisation of penalties and the reintroduction of the word "serious" into clause 10 were supported by all parties in the other place.

I reiterate what has been said by the hon. Members for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) and for South Down (Mr. McGrady). The vast proportion of the marches pass off without any problem. Of nearly 3,000 in 1996, only 15 had problems. Of a similar number in 1997, again few had problems.

Like all hon. Members here, I am obviously concerned about the troubles in Londonderry, or Derry, last weekend. I hope that such problems would have been avoided had the commission been in place. I note the £5 million cost of those troubles and I hope that the business community, representatives of which I met last week, will regard it as an aberration and continue their investment in Northern Ireland, which has tremendous opportunities for the business community. I note the comments of the hon. Member for South Down condemning all those involved.

The all-party group met a number of people last week and I felt that there was strong hope for a better future for Northern Ireland. We should not forget the past but we should work towards a vision for the future.

The highlight of the days that I spent in Northern Ireland was a meeting with women's groups, set up by Lady Mayhew, to whose continued interest in Northern Ireland I pay tribute. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) put a slightly different slant on those discussions. To put the record straight, the women's groups there were very much in favour of additional child care and training for single parents to enable them to return to work.

Mr. Öpik: Might not it be imprudent for the hon. Gentleman to pursue that particular track, given that it has been extensively debated within the Chamber and outside?

Mr. Colman: Having spoken to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, I understand that he is happy for me to bring the matter up, as he also wishes that the House should not be misinformed of the nature of that meeting.

I was about to talk about what to me was perhaps the defining moment when we met that group of people—an eloquent presentation by May Blood of the Greater Shankill area partnership board and Geraldine O'Regan of the Upper Springfield development trust. They were working together on their joint application for European Union urban funds and the European peace and reconciliation moneys that are available.

I believe that the work that those women are carrying out is apposite as an example of what we can learn from. Many good things are happening in Northern Ireland, such as the work on the early years programme and the training for life project. Those are activities that we can learn from, adopt and carry forward in the rest of the UK.

Hon. Members might ask what that has to do with the Bill. I noticed that all the communities that we met wanted peace—not peace at any price, but peace on the basis of fairness, justice and equality. I believe that the Bill is a further step towards that achievement.

5.49 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): This is a vital debate for the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. Alas, many people have not been prepared to study the situation. I deeply resent the falsehood that the Minister put into my mouth. I did not ask him to go down the road of history, but I asked him to look at the history of the legislation before us.

We had better get the facts of the matter straight. Today at the Dispatch Box, the Minister seemed unaware that something had happened on this date some time ago—a disaster for democracy, when an attempt was made by the Conservative Government to thrust down the throats of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland an Anglo-Irish Agreement.

That agreement was never made the law of this country, but now I notice that in the talks Bertie Ahern wants it to be made the law of this country by doctoring the Government of Ireland Act 1920, and bringing it in as part of that. Of course that is an outrageous suggestion, totally unacceptable to the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was thrust upon the people of Northern Ireland and rushed through the House. It was to be the panacea for all the evils in Northern Ireland. How foolish those people, even Lady Thatcher who was one of its sponsors, appear in the aftermath of what took place.

We are in an aftermath now. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) has left the Chamber—oh no, there he is on the Back Bench. Perhaps he might take notice of some of the things I am saying, if he had time even to listen to my speech. He should go back and study the public order order and realise that it makes criminal in Northern Ireland what is not a crime here. Let us get it straight. The actions that the order legislates against and makes crimes, would be law-abiding actions by the citizens of any other part of the United Kingdom.

Some of the matters of which we now face the aftermath arose because of the influence of Mr. Lenahan and the Anglo-Irish conference, which decided that there must be a public order order to deal with everything connected with processions and protests. What did they do? They closed their eyes to the most important facet of the parade system—traditional parades.

The House may not know this, but traditional parades are both Unionist and nationalist, both Orange and republican. In my constituency, the Hibernians march through prominent Protestant areas on the day of their celebration. The same happens in other constituencies.

Although the Hibernians go through what hon. Members might describe in the House as "bigoted Orange areas", the Orangemen do not lift a finger to them; indeed, many stand and watch them go by. In the past, before the House started to institutionalise the divisions in our country, it was well known that the bandmaster trained both bands. He would visit one hall one week and the other hall the other week—the Hibernian and the Orange. It may come as a great surprise to learn that even the drums were loaned by each band for particular celebrations.

We need to establish the facts of the matter, and say what the Government did to please the Irish Republic. I found it amusing to hear the Tory party spokesman,

the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), saying some of the things he said today. I wish that he had said those things in earlier days, instead of backing his Government and giving them his nod of assent.

Everybody in the House to whom I have listened has said, "Yes, there are traditional parades, and they cause no trouble." The traditional parades of the Hibernians go through Orange areas, and nothing is done. Great pressure has been put on me as a Member of Parliament to say that we should stop those parades and give them the same sauce as they give us.

I have made it clear publicly that I shall do no such thing. I believe in civil and religious liberty for all men, and those people are entitled to go along a route that they have passed along for years. As has been said, some of the parades pass by in 10 to 15 minutes.

However, the IRA grasped the fact that the public order order was up its street, and immediately decided to attack traditional parades. The House does not need to take my word for it. In a well—publicised RTE programme Gerry Adams admitted that it had taken three years of preparation and planning to organise and orchestrate the anti-parade feeling, which he said is going to be exploited to the advantage of the Provisional IRA.

By passing the legislation, the House is helping Adams on in his work, for nobody believes that the Bill will end the problems of parades; I noticed that not even Ministers were confident about that. Some hon. Members have asked where the strength of the Chief Constable now resides with regard to the parades, and how much power he has over them.

The IRA saw a weakness in the legislation, and said, "Right, we will concentrate on that." Of course, the IRA concentrated on the areas in which it could best mobilise and, by propaganda, give a false impression to the world about what was happening.

As for Drumcree, the propaganda that the world has listened to says that Orangemen deliberately walk through republican and nationalist housing estates. That has been said again and again, but it is untrue. I rather resent what the Minister said about Drumcree, because he did not go into the background.

Why do the Orangemen go down that road? It is because of a brokered agreement with the police. I happened to be a party to the meetings, and the police decided that the Tunnel area of Portadown would be closed to Orangemen for all time, despite the fact that they had always walked that way. Because that was the way that the Orangemen walked from Drumcree, the police gave a promise that the other road would always be kept open to them, because it was an arterial road.

The authorities gave the Orangemen that promise. Is it good reason or good sense that, without any consultation and with a heavy hand, the authorities should decide against what they had promised? If the boot was on the other foot and that had happened to nationalists, they would be here screaming, "Murder," and asking, "Why did you suddenly break your word?"

We have heard a lot about the problems at Drumcree and we know there were problems—the people who live in Northern Ireland know that better than anyone in this House. However, the aftermath of Drumcree was not all Protestant or Orange violence, and the Minister should know that. He knows who made the initial attack on both occasions. It is unfair for the hon. Gentleman to say that we are all to blame.

I do not think that the Apprentice Boys in Londonderry were to blame for what happened there on Saturday. As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) told us, and we should listen to what he has said, the slogans were not against the Apprentice Boys: they were all anti-police. We are told that this Bill will alter things. Even if it is enacted, it will not make any alteration.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) told us in the debate on the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill that doing away with the oath of allegiance for the police would make no difference and neither will it. The issue is that we have to face up to those elements who intend violence. This Bill is a charter that will assist them, and that is what worries the Unionists. This Bill will help them to make more trouble.

When the Government issued the Bill, it was disastrous that they did not make the punishments for both offences equal. They should have been equal from the beginning. People are saying, "As a person thinks in his heart, so is he." When the Bill was first presented in another place—it was not a draft—why were the penalties for the crimes not considered equally?

Furthermore, the person who breaks up a parade should have a heavier sentence than people who apply to walk legally and who are refused. The people who break up the parades institute the violence, and hon. Members ought to know that.

I do not understand. Here we have a traditional parade that has gone down a road for 150 years. If the police tell people, "You're not going to walk that road again," and they attempt to walk it, they will get the same penalty as people gathering up 1,000 petrol bombs and throwing them at the police. If any penalty is to be more severe, it should be the penalty for those who take the law into their own hands and who attack the police who are doing their duty—even under this legislation.

We must face up to reality when considering those issues. It is all very well saying that the police have been even-handed, but have they? It is all very well saying that the police should act in keeping with the law, but do they?

As I have said, while I support the Royal Ulster Constabulary, I do not support every officer in it. Tonight, the Chief Constable has been eulogised here. I have already tabled my objections to him and put in an official complaint. I received a reply saying that the Chief Constable has full power to refuse a complaint against himself. That is something, is it not? I was told that my complaint would not proceed. The Chief Constable said that he would not allow it to do so.

The Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, told my friends and me deliberate falsehoods about what had happened at Dunloy, and completely misled us. When I took the only way open to me and put in a complaint against him, I discovered that he still had the power to say whether the complaint would be proceeded with, and he said that it would not be. What remedy do people have? That is why I welcomed the legislation to provide an ombudsman when we discussed the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill. Then we can get to the point. Those matters deeply concern the people of Northern Ireland.

When the situation arose in Harryville, which is part of my constituency, why were plenty of police not available to ensure that those people got to and from their place of worship? It is on the record that I did not support what was done there. My record stands on that and I want to

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make that clear to the House. I do not believe in attacking people who are going to any place of worship by verbally abusing them or throwing stones at them.

Mr. Godman: As an hon. Member speaking from the Government side of the House, may I say how pleased and grateful I am to the hon. Gentleman for his outright condemnation of those people at Harryville who seek to deter people from going to their church service?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Further up my constituency in Dunloy, the police presence was intended to keep Orangemen from worshipping in their own hall—not in a church. The police had banned the church. It had already been attacked. The windows had been smashed and the main burial plots rifled. The police told people that they could not walk there because there would be trouble and said, "They've done that to the church, what will they not do to you?"

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) knows this, but the Harryville Roman Catholic place of worship is what we would call a chapel in Northern Ireland. It is different in this country, where chapels are dissenting, nonconformist places of worship.

Mr. Godman: And in Scotland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, that is right.

In Harryville, the Roman Catholic place of worship is in the midst of a 98 per cent. Protestant area and yet the police were able—and they were right—to say that people could go to their place of worship. However, the police then turned on people who had gathered to go to their own hall and, as a result, those people made scores of complaints to the police adjudication board about the way they were treated. What did the police do? They promoted the officer in charge, putting him in charge of all the complaints. That is the system that we are working against in Northern Ireland.

A few weeks ago, after much discussion, in which I engaged, we were able to persuade the police to allow a religious service for the Apprentice Boys of Londonderry in the hall. However, when the police chiefs met me, they objected to the preacher the Apprentice Boys wanted—himself an Apprentice Boy—because they said that he might say things that republicans did not like. I said that that was getting into the very depths of intolerance, because a man is entitled to go to an Orange hall and speak his mind, and if he says anything contrary to the law there are authorities to deal with that.

I told the police that they had no right to tell the Orangemen who should preach to them. They said that they did not want there to be a loudspeaker outside the hall, and I said that there would be a crowd in that small hall, so why could not the people in the grounds hear what was said? Eventually, they consented and we had the meeting. As a result, there is an easing of tension in Dunloy.

I hope that that will be built on, and that the Orangemen will be permitted to go to their place of worship once a year. It is an Irish Presbyterian place of worship and the Moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Church put on record the pressures that were on his people in that area. It used to be a flourishing church, but the Moderator said that now he did not need a full-time caretaker. When the caretaker had left, his house was not needed, so it was sold.

On the radio in Northern Ireland, the Moderator said that people taunted his congregation as they arrived at church, saying, "We've got the sexton's house, we've got the caretaker away, your minister is now shared with another parish, and we'll get him and your church away." It is not an Orange church; we are talking about people going to an ordinary place of worship on a Sabbath day. The situation is totally unacceptable to the Protestant community.

Dunloy is a little enclave of republicanism in the heartland of Protestantism, and the Protestants have tolerated that behaviour, largely because they have been exhorted by myself and others to bear with it until we get the matter settled. I have had no help whatever from the police authorities or from Ministers. I have never heard a Minister saying anything about Dunloy, but I heard the Secretary of State at his party conference talking about Harryville.

It is time that we realised that there are two sides to the story. I have made it clear, in places where the message was not well received, that there is no justification for attacking anybody going to any place of worship. People are entitled to do that, and that must be declared strongly. I hope that Ministers will realise that there are people who do wrong in Northern Ireland and that they cannot simply say that we are all to blame.

The vast majority of people in Londonderry were not to blame for Saturday. I talked to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) yesterday, and he was far from approving of what was done, because it was surely a setback to all his work. The incidents are a serious setback to all that we are trying to achieve. The peace and reconciliation money has been mentioned. That money would not have been there but for the hon. Member for Foyle, Jim Nicholson and myself: we got that money.

We also encouraged the setting up of the partnership boards, as the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) knows, to ensure that the money is spent equally across the community. We are not dragging our feet, but the issues are fundamental and run to the very heart of the problem; they must be faced.

Great praise has been given to the North commission, but it included two representatives, the Very Rev. John Dunlop and Father Crilly, who had already gone on the record as against parades. I cannot be expected, as a public representative, to swallow what they say. Why could not we have had a commission that everyone knew had not committed itself on anything? That is why there is opposition to the North commission and to the Bill.

There will not be co-operation on the legislation, and it is a tragedy that we cannot come to grips with the matter. Public order legislation is inadequate. It is not very often that the majority of Unionists have gone to gaol on an issue, but we all went to gaol on the public order legislation, because we saw what was coming and that there would be opposition if traditional parades were interfered with.

Ormeau road is a main arterial road into Belfast. I lived there, and my church is adjacent to the road. The street at the bottom of Ormeau road is called Cooke street after

the greatest son of Irish Presbyterianism, Henry Cooke. Off the road is what is known as the holy land, because the streets are named after places in Palestine, and that was a predominantly Protestant area, but the other side, from Hatfield street, was slowly and surely infiltrated from Cromac street, up the road. As a result, even the cricket ground was attacked.

The Ormeau road is a main road that people go up and down, and what did the IRA-Sinn Fein man say? He said, "Never again will we allow a Protestant foot to walk on this road." That cannot be done in Northern Ireland. If a man said, "Never will I allow a Hibernian foot to walk on this road," the Hibernians would say, "Well, we'll show you."

I raised the matter with the Prime Minister, and asked him what he intended to do, because the Orangemen are entitled to go to their place of worship and walk down the main thoroughfare. The IRA can hold its celebrations in front of the city hall in the very heart of Belfast. Not only that, but a councillor can bring three of them into the city hall and those men can go up on the roof and start to paint slogans, and then lay what was supposed to be a bomb, all wired up; it all happened.

On the other side, the people sitting at the table who are supposed to represent the Ulster Defence Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force and other elements come down to the city hall and hold a meeting wearing the uniforms of outlawed organisations, and nothing is done. It will not be a surprise to see armed IRA men in uniform at the city hall. If the one side does it, so will the other. It is time to have a law that everyone must be made amenable to. That can be done only when the law is seen to be fair and to set out not to attack anybody, but to make people behave properly.

Public order legislation is inadequate and must be replaced with more practical legal formulations. In particular, the law should be recast to reintroduce the protection for traditional parades. Parades that have gone ahead for 100 years on a public road should not be banned. Of course, no parade should go into a housing estate that opposes it, but we are talking about public roads. As was made clear earlier, there is only one point at which the housing by the Garvaghy road abuts on to the road, and at that point there is no opposition whatever.

We should recognise the fundamental right to march, except where a march or parade is organised by or in support of an illegal organisation or for illegal or subversive activities. Those should be the criteria. People should not be allowed to hold a parade if it is in the interests of subversion or to support criminal activities. Those criteria must be introduced into the law. The right to march must not be hindered by those who oppose the marchers' identity and threaten public disorder.

I received a telephone call from a police officer in a certain place in Northern Ireland. I shall not mention the area for I do not want to have any maligning of his name. He said, "If your people are not on the streets of this town on Sunday afternoon, the IRA will walk with their tricolours and all." I said, "So you are telling me that my people must risk engaging in lawlessness in order to keep the IRA off the streets. What are you doing about it?" He said, "Oh, there is no law now about traditional parades so I have to let it go." That is an impossible situation to put people into.

Protests must keep within the law and must not be allowed to hinder a lawful parade. It is possible to hold a legitimate protest without hindering a lawful parade. People in politics in Northern Ireland are well used to people opposing them and to hearing what they say. Moreover, church parades ought to be given sympathetic consideration. Most loyal order church parades are held to mark victories—not victories of 1690 but victories of modern times, in world war one and world war two in remembrance of honoured deaths. Church parades must be included.

It is interesting to note what some people need to understand about the mentality of certain individuals who do not want parades. A most interesting book was published recently which I commend to the House. It is written by a Roman Catholic, Finnula O'Connor, and entitled "In Search of a State—Catholics in Northern Ireland". Everyone should read that book. The author found that many Catholics held an erroneous view about the Protestant community. She said:

"The essence is a desire for supremacy, not accommodation".

She confirmed that that was the public opinion made known to her. Later in her study she explains how many Catholics are sustained by the view that Protestants are bigots, saying, "We are not bigots, because we are not Protestants."

Now we are getting to the real mentality of the people who went out and threw petrol bombs on Saturday and then said that they made them in five minutes. The hon. Member for East Londonderry told us how many gallons of petrol had had to be gathered up. They did not gather it up in five minutes.

Finnula O'Connor says that Catholics

"lovingly dwell on those Protestants who tell them that they covet the wealth of Irish traditional music and that they feel deprived of their heritage."

She then quotes John Hume saying that Unionist paralysis is caused by

"the siege mentality—inbuilt in what is a guilt complex and an inferiority complex."

Such ill-informed views are widely and lovingly cherished by many Roman Catholic people about Protestants. Of course, there are those Protestants who have a completely wrong view of Roman Catholics and do not understand the situation of Roman Catholics.

I am happy that, even though I am reckoned a bigot by some people, I sent my children to a mixed school so that they could bring their Roman Catholic fellow scholars home with them and we could meet them. The Roman Catholic children could find out that we had no horns or tails and that my wife could make a good Ulster fry that they could enjoy. The time has come when we must realise that there are many people who are suffering most, yet they are not guilty of anything.

I heard the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman talking about the 12 July parades. I have taken part in processions on this side of the water in which there was good friendship and fellowship, even though too much liquor was consumed. Liquor seems to curse all parades. I am opposed to liquor drinking. I wish that the Government would say that on all parade days no liquor shops should be open. We would then have less nonsense. People get plied with drink. When John Barleycorn calls in, the whip is out and people get started.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

There is a holiday spirit on 12 July. I hope that the hon. Member for Putney will accept my invitation to come over on 12 July and then on 15 August to see the Hibernians. Then perhaps he will have a different view. From dozens of Orange halls and community centres of one sort or another, bands can be heard practising for the big march. There are more bands per acre per head of the population in Ulster than in any other part of the kingdom, if not of the world. I want to tell the House that that is good musical talent. Some of the people, including the flautist, who is recognised as a great man across the world, learned to play in a kick-the-Pope band, as it is called in the Shankill road. Some people forget about their background and heritage.

Until recently, the uniform for the parade was standard: the company director and the docker turned out alike. An umbrella was rolled up with meticulous care so that it looked almost like a sword and carried stiffly with military precision. Orangemen insisted that that was for the practical reason that, even in Ulster, sometimes it rains on 12 July.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry put his finger on the point. Why does the IRA hate the marches? It is because they are part of a bulwark that it must pull down if it is to succeed in its campaign to destroy the United Kingdom. Everyone knows that the Orange institution is linked to the Official Unionist party, but thousands of Democratic Unionists are members, and many hold office in its ranks. There are Labour men who are members.

In fact, many Labour men in Scotland are Orangemen. When I came to the House, one of them came over to me and said, "I am the worshipful district master of a certain place. I am glad to meet you." He had a trade union badge on his breast and he suggested that we exchange badges. I gave him my badge and he gave me his. The Scotch people and the Liverpudlians perhaps might realise the situation better than some people.

If we study history, we will find that British Government after British Government have decided that they can do something about parades. They have banned them and they have imprisoned people for taking part in them. They have introduced legislation and they have used the sword on them. Yet what has happened? People are still there and still marching. It would be far better for us to arrange measures tonight to enable people to march in peace and enable those who want to make their protest to realise that it must be made within the law. When that is established properly, people will have to live with a march passing for 10 minutes on a road.

I wish that the disturbance lasted only 10 minutes in some cases in which I have been involved in my neighbourhood. Drinking clubs turn out at all hours of the night and there is vandalism after they close. The parades pass for only 10 minutes. I have been told that the whole of the Garvaghy road takes no more than 16 minutes.

The Bill is not the solution. We will come back to this again and see that it is not the solution. The solution is to face up to the real difficulties. People must know that, as long as we are in this House, Northern Ireland is going to remain in the United Kingdom. The Government can have as many talks with Gerry Adams at Stormont as they like, and make as many concessions to him as they like, but the vast majority of the Northern Ireland people—and according to Priest Paul of Dungannon, some 15 per cent. of the Roman Catholic people—say that we are going to remain in the Union. The sooner that that is recognised and we start legislating with that in mind, the sooner we will move to something that can bring a real solution to this problem.

6.29 pm

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) made an uncharacteristically lengthy speech, in which he rightly argued the case for fair laws. The legitimacy of legislation is determined by its acceptance or rejection by the majority of the people whose behaviour it seeks to shape.

I am sorry to disturb the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), but in his closing remarks he observed that my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) and for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) had no understanding of marches and the circumstances surrounding them. He may be right to some extent. Labour Members do not have a thousandth of the experience of Ulster Unionist Members or of my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), but it is absurd to tell someone from the west of Scotland that he has no experience of Orange parades. One of the biggest public events in Scotland in the early summer is an Orange parade.

With my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride, for Clydebank and Milngavie and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), I was proud to take part only a few years ago in a parade through Glasgow. I had better tell the hon. Member for North Antrim, who wants me in the Orange Order, that it was not an Orange parade but a celebration of the 70th birthday of Nelson Mandela. Even the police admitted that 25,000 people were on the parade, but the west of Scotland has Orange parades every year that are bigger than that.

There are differences. The hon. Members for North Antrim and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) are well known in my constituency. They have well- kent faces. I remind the hon. Member for East Londonderry that some of the finest bands that take part in the parades he attends come from the west of Scotland, so we have some comprehension of parades. The difference is that our communities accommodate each other. We live in peace and harmony.

It was not always the case. My wife, born and raised in Govan, knows from her early childhood that things could be lively and that a big police presence was needed. There is a story, possibly apocryphal, in the west of Scotland that the chief constable in Strathclyde had a nice sense of humour. He always put a Catholic police officer in charge of Orange parades, while republican parades would be marshalled by a Presbyterian police officer.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): In the hon. Gentleman's area, there is no Sinn Fein-IRA to oppose marches. Many people support and watch marches. That is why they go off peacefully. Furthermore, the constitution of the people of Scotland is not under threat.

Mr. Godman: I said that there were many more differences than similarities. I said that the other evening as well—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was

here. None the less, there are some similarities. He is right, but we have some Sinn Fein supporters and some extremist supporters of the other side. When I was a member of the review committee at Edinburgh prison, in six months I interviewed three men who were being assessed for release under licence. All three were extremist loyalists who had been gaoled for gun running.

While we have some experience, it is not a thousandth of the suffering of the people who are represented by Unionist Members. We have some understanding and a lot of sympathy. If we did not, we would not be involved in a debate such as this. We are friends of the people of Northern Ireland. There are many tangled relationships between Northern Ireland and the west of Scotland. I believe that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has a sister who runs a very fine guest house down in Kintyre—not that I am advertising the establishment for her. Arrests in the west of Scotland are usually because the police have to lift drunks. In the west of Scotland, people accommodate each other. My only deep regret is that the same does not prevail in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): When the police tell groups that want to march through the streets of Glasgow that their chosen routes are not suitable—not for fear of public disorder but because of traffic disorder—they accept it. They may not like it, they may grumble, but they accept it.

Mr. Godman: I am pleased that the differences in the west of Scotland are confined to Ibrox and Parkhead in the main. I want to be brief. I shall not speak for as long as some hon. Members have. I know that people want to go home.

The Bill was changed in the other place. Clause 3 was removed, and other amendments were made. I have a couple of questions for my hon. Friend from the other side of the Clyde, the Under-Secretary. I want UIE to come to my side, of course, but that is another story.

May I impress on the Minister that new legislation should be used to ensure that civil rights are not pushed to one side by those who believe that might is on their side. The hon. Member for North Antrim was right about that. The legislation has to be seen to be fair to the people of the two traditions. All sections of the community must be seen to be treated with equity. The commission, not the RUC, must become the arbiter of what is to be seen as just and fair conduct. Those claiming the right to march have to take responsibility for their actions.

I do not believe that this legislation panders to one side or the other. It needs to be amended. I do not anticipate serving on the Standing Committee. The Whip is scowling at me, so perhaps I will.

On clause 12, why do bands need to be registered? I thought that registration of bands had been on the statute book for some years. I am not sure that anyone has been able to demonstrate how best such registration can be employed. What is the point of it? In Scotland, the Orange Order organises its own registration of bands.

If, despite my reservations, clause 12 remains unamended, what about the Scottish bands that take part in parades? I know that there are some fine bands in Northern Ireland in both communities, but some of the best bands and players come from my constituency. Under clause 12, would Scottish bands that play regularly in Northern Ireland have to register?

As for the commission, what about the role of the chairman? Perhaps I should say "or chairwoman", given that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) is sitting alongside me—I believe that she is the only female Member here tonight. I hope that three women will be appointed to the commission, so why not create a chairman or a chairwoman?

I should like to see a judicial person—perhaps a retired judge or a Queen's counsel—appointed to the commission, because, whatever the qualities and qualifications of the other commissioners, someone with a legal background and training would strengthen it and give added confidence to other commissioners when they make their determinations.

I have been influenced in my thinking on the commission and the Bill by two academics, Dominic Bryan and Neil Jarman. I asked those two gentlemen what they thought about the commission.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Down had some reservations about clause 2, under which determinations are made. When the commission gathers information, takes evidence, offers a preliminary view and then makes a formal determination, I hope that there will be an opportunity for such a determination to be reviewed on the basis of fresh evidence or fresh applications being submitted.

I welcome the Bill in principle, but I would like answers to my questions.

6.40 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): We heard earlier about some of the credentials of other hon. Members who have spoken. Although I went to the Royal Belfast Academical Institution—I think that I can say without fear of contradiction that it is the best school in Northern Ireland—I still do not pretend to have all the answers. I am surprised that I got away with that comment about my school, but there we go.

Mr. Trimble: It was merely Presbyterian courtesy.

Mr. Öpik: I realise now that it was that rather than anything else which led to my remark being heard in silence.

I do not pretend to have the answers to the problems and the views that I express on behalf of the Liberal Democrats are meant to add value to the debate. I do not pretend to have a monopoly on good ideas, but I offer these comments in a spirit of constructive debate.

Marches and parades have become increasingly contentious in the past three years. Drumcree has been discussed and I will not rehearse the arguments about it. Nevertheless, it must be said that there is a huge cost involved in such parades in terms of the estrangement that they cause between communities and between the police and those communities as a result of the disturbances that take place. A gulf has also developed between the perspectives of the two groups. On the one hand, some people perceive that their inalienable right to assemble and march is being infringed for political motives; on the other, people feel that an alien culture is being forced upon them, backed up by the might of the security forces.

[Mr. Öpik]

There is always the danger, as we have seen again tonight, of looking for problems rather than solutions and looking for those at fault rather than considering what we can do to move forward. I have a minor concern because politicians on the mainland sometimes misinterpret that debate and seek to find fault with the Northern Irish politicians, many of whom try very hard to seek accords between the two sides.

I am the first to admit that I have had many heated debates with colleagues from Northern Ireland on such issues and I have many differences with them. I recognise, however, and I hope that the House does, too, that in order to make progress we do not just have to introduce Bills with which we may or may not agree, but we have to provide the space for detente to be established among those politicians.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) spoke about the important principles of law, justice and equality. He also spoke about the importance of voluntary restrictions and tolerance. We must not only encourage such attitudes among others, but display them in our own behaviour. Voluntary restrictions and tolerance must be exercised by both sides. It is so easy to expect the other side to show those characteristics without feeling the need to make what may feel like considerable concessions oneself.

We can choose to see what we want to see. We can choose to be offended and, above all else, we can choose to believe in our right to perform certain actions. That is at the core of the debate.

The North report sought to align those perspectives. The North commission held 93 separate meetings and produced a document of more than 200 pages. The legislation, which was enacted in the twilight weeks of the previous Conservative Government, insisted on a notification period for parades, restrictions on alcohol and some other important measures which were instrumental in making the parades of the summer of 1997 markedly less troublesome than those of the past.

The Bill takes the North report recommendations further. Let me say at this point that the Liberal Democrats therefore believe that the Bill is the correct way to proceed at this time. Let us not forget that about 3,000 marches are held and just a tiny proportion of those end up on the news for being contentious. The legislation is targeted not at the 99 per cent. that pass without incident, but at the 1 per cent. that cause problems. I do not know what effect the legislation will have on the other 99 per cent., but I sincerely hope that we can navigate a way through that does not impinge on the peace-loving and sensible marches that take place, which are respected by both sides of the community.

The Bill is therefore welcome to Liberal Democrats, and we will give it our whole-hearted support, because of its central innovation—the Parades Commission. It is a truly sensible way to regulate such matters. It is independent and I hope that it will be a major advance in the effort to decouple concerns about political expedience from the desire to do the right thing.

It is also good to see that the powers of decision making by the commission are not unaccountable. In certain circumstances, as set out in article 9 of the public order order, the Secretary of State may reconsider them. The Secretary of State will remain responsible for the overall situation in the Province. The Parades Commission is not a quango to which the Secretary of State can simply pass the buck or offload the blame. Nevertheless, the commission has real decision-making authority and, as much as responsibilities can be clearly delineated, the Bill is successful in achieving that.

It is also welcome to see a Bill that contains such a rounded group of measures. For example, I was glad to see that in clause 13—unlucky for some—clear punishments are laid down for those who obstruct a march that has been allowed by the commission and that those punishments are equal to the punishments meted out to those who parade when they are not allowed to do so. That clause has been referred to before, and I recognise that it is somewhat contentious, but we support it. It is important for the commission to be seen to be even-handed and the clause will help it to be so.

The Bill has distilled the perceptiveness and thoughtfulness of the North report into balanced, carefully worded legislation. I was glad to see that the Government took on so many of the points made in another place. For example, the words "serious" and "undue" have been added to clause 1 as a result of the wise suggestion of Conservative Members. Liberal Democrats were glad to see more realistic treatment being given to the issue of alcohol at public processions. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) made some good points about that.

All of those in another place, including Unionists and nationalists, were able to fall in behind the move to abandon former clause 3 that would have extended the remit of the commission to cover the rather strange phrase:

"other expressions of cultural identity".

I pay tribute to Lord Alderdice for being one of the first to recognise the folly of giving the commission such wide-ranging powers. I suspect that it did not relish the prospect of having to implement them. If the commission had had powers over

"other expressions of cultural identity"

who knows what would have been banned? Painted kerbstones and tricolours would probably have been out of the window straight away, and shamrocks and poppies would have been next. Would green jumpers have been considered contentious? Would the Orange mobile phone network have come under the hammer? I wonder whether the Spice Girls movie would have been allowed to open in Northern Ireland, given that in the film the girls drive around in a huge bus with a Union Jack on the side. Lord Alderdice was able to highlight the nonsense of legislating against such things—although I understand that he used other examples.

One of the lessons to be learnt from that phrase is that anything can be made into a symbolic act if we choose to judge it as such. There is sometimes a tendency in our debates to confuse the wider issues, as revealed by that example. The clause would have made the legislation difficult to operate and we should all be glad to see the back of it.

We Liberal Democrats also have some concerns about the Bill. First, according to the Bill, several parades cannot be treated as a unit. We feel that it would be more

helpful if the commission were able to treat marches in groups so that it could negotiate with the various marchers and decide on the merits of each march. Marchers would be able to march and local residents would be pleased to have severely cut the number of marches in some situations. That would acknowledge the reality of the situation in Northern Ireland, with a certain amount of negotiation always taking place in the background.

At present, as the commission cannot take into account the pattern and frequency of marches, if it were to allow one march along a particular route, it should be inclined to allow identical marches the following week in order to keep things balanced. As the Bill stands, the commission could be forced to give all-or-nothing verdicts rather than the balanced compromises that are so desperately needed in these delicate situations. I understand why this proposed change might be incompatible with the European convention on human rights and the forthcoming United Kingdom human rights Bill. We should like to consider this aspect and I would welcome the views of the Under-Secretary of State when he winds up the debate.

I also note that the commission's preliminary view will be given informally. Consultation is valuable. There is a danger that if the commission were to publish its preliminary view informally, some people might try to use coercion to get it to change its views. We must avoid that temptation and that danger. The commission must be clear minded and specific about what informal consultation means and what it will take to make it change its initial judgment.

In another place, the Under-Secretary of State gave a commitment to deal with the issue of a code of conduct for counter-demonstrations. While I appreciate the need for counter-demonstrations to be regulated, I wonder whether an in-depth code of conduct is wise. Surely, existing public order legislation is sufficient. If a mob are obstructing a parade that has been allowed by the Parades Commission, could they not be read the riot act and dealt with accordingly under existing legislation? The code of conduct could be useful as long as it is a simple distillation of current public order legislation. Whatever the code of conduct turns out to be, it must be simple, straightforward and unambiguous.

Paragraph 13 of schedule 1 calls for an annual report from the commission. Is it intended that that report should be debated on the Floor of the House? I commend the Government on their decision, in another place, to make concessions on what has become clause 15, which will increase parliamentary scrutiny.

Paragraph 3 of schedule 1 makes it clear that the Secretary of State may not remove the chairman or any members of the commission owing to the decisions that they make that fall within their remit. That fact should be widely publicised as it will help to establish the commission's independence.

We should do well to reflect on the considered process that has brought the legislation before us. The North report was extremely well thought out. The other place gave the Bill thorough treatment and hon. Members benefit from that, and also from the Government's reasonable attitude in taking on suggestions made from all parties.

Alastair Graham and the Parades Ccommission will need luck and our support in the months ahead if they are to implement the legislation wisely. We therefore wish them luck in their daunting task and we hope that they will take on board any developments and evolutions that strike them as reasonable as they move towards implementation of the Bill.

The hon. Member for North Antrim said that a Bill will not solve the problems of parades, and he was correct. Effective implementation of the Bill is not a result, but an attitude; success in the affairs of Northern Ireland is not an outcome, but a choice. Such a hard choice involves compromises on all sides. No Government Bill can cause that to happen, nor can I, as the Liberal Democrat spokesman on Northern Ireland. But there are those in the House who have great influence over Northern Irish matters. Although it is a difficult job and no one underestimates the challenges for those who operate on a day-to-day basis in the Province, it is up to them, with the full backing of the House, to seek ways forward.

I offer my services and those of my party to help the process move forward. We must recognise above all that the fact that the Bill is before us is a symptom of the deeper problems in Northern Ireland that many hon. Members on both sides of the House and many Northern Ireland colleagues have lucidly described.

Ultimately, it is important that those involved directly in the settlement talks know that everyone at Westminster wishes them well in searching for a solution. The Bill is not intended to be a panacea for every problem, but a statement, and, I hope, a controlling mechanism to calm some of the problems of the past. Good will from those who partake to make parades more inclusive and less threatening, coupled with good will from local residents, who should occasionally give marchers the benefit of the doubt, would be immensely welcome.

We shall do all that we can to assist in the process and the Government can be assured of the good will of the Liberal Democrats as the Bill proceeds.

6.54 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): It is good to be able to be called tonight to speak about the Bill. We welcome the fact that it is a Bill, not an order, so that we shall have the opportunity fully to debate its principles; then, in Committee, discuss it in detail; and finally discuss it during its remaining stages before it eventually becomes law.

It is tragic that those who represent the Government in Northern Ireland pay so little attention to the elected representatives of the Province. It is clear from what has been said tonight that all the hon. Members who represent the Ulster Unionist party, the majority party in Northern Ireland, which won the election, oppose the Bill. But those who come over to govern us from Westminster have the arrogance to think that they know more about Northern Ireland than the elected representatives. They seek to impose their will on the people of Northern Ireland and we can see this clearly in the Bill.

I am reminded of the words of a famous man, Lord Denning, who said of the universal declaration of human rights of the United Nations that everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association:

"This freedom has only been won after much pain and anguish. It is bound up with the right to demonstrate. These demonstrations are made for various causes. Often it is to protest against the Government or against its doings. People march along the streets. They carry banners. They hear speeches. History shows how much

[Mr. William Thompson]

Governments have disliked those demonstrations. So much so that they used to regard them as unlawful assemblies. They arrested the ringleaders and prosecuted them. Sometimes the demonstrations were for good causes, sometimes for bad causes. In principle, all these can and should be allowed by law so long as they are peaceful."

Unfortunately, I do not think that a more hurtful Bill on public order has ever been debated in the House. Indeed, the restrictions that will now be placed on parades are greater than have ever been proposed in the House. The present legislation relating to public order in Northern Ireland is the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. Article 4 of part II of the order lays down the four criteria under which a policeman can re-route a parade. It states that he may do so if

"*(a)* it may result in serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community; or

(b) the purpose of the persons organising it is the intimidation of others with a view to compelling them not to do an act they have a right to do, or to do an act they have a right not to do".

Those words are a direct quotation from the Public Order Act 1986 relating to mainland England and Wales. It is remarkable that that Bill was opposed, tooth and nail, by the Labour party. Labour Members insisted that the first criteria on—

"it may result in serious public disorder"—

was sufficient and they strongly opposed the other criteria. It is rather strange that, despite their opposition then, the Labour Government are here tonight proposing far more severe restrictions on any public parade.

When we look up the Committee stage of the 1986 Act, we find that the present Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), opposed the measures greatly. He said that they were drawn from the law in South Africa and told us that

"The White Paper outlines some of the Government's reasons for the inclusion of the power, which even President Botha has not yet taken it upon himself to use."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 27 February 1986; c. 534.]

When we came to the final stages of the Bill, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), then the Opposition spokesmen, said:

"We still dislike some of part I, and especially some of part II, considerably. I give notice to the Minister and his officials that an incoming Labour Government after the general election will repeal most of the contentious aspects of part II and consider part I."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1986; Vol. 96, c. 1063.]

After some years, the Labour party has arrived in government. Are the Labour Government going to repeal the Public Order Act 1986, because they find that the conditions and restrictions therein are as unacceptable now as they were then?

In 1986, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) stated:

"In 1979 the Government claimed that they would set the people free. They talked about law and order and said that they would impose a short, sharp shock on those who were supposed to be upsetting society at that time. After seven years, the Government have not set the people free."

He went on to say he was happy that his right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton had said that parts of the legislation would be replaced by a future Labour Government because

"the legislation attacks civil liberties."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1986; Vol. 96, c. 1068.]

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am not totally aware of the circumstances, but one thing I do know is that today we have an entirely different Bill before us, which cannot in any way be described as comparable with the 1986 Act. I remind the hon. Gentleman that 11 years have passed, which is a long time in politics. In 1986, Northern Ireland was ablaze; now, we have an opportunity to get a peaceful settlement. What is taking place here today is an attempt—no more than that—at providing a building block to peace. I also remind him that 11 years ago, he and his hon. Friends would not have been seen dead with Gerry Adams; now, they go into the same room. He should understand that the ground has shifted quite considerably, not only for me, but for him and for the leader of his party. I want to see this building block secure; I do not want to go back to what happened in 1986. I want to see a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Thompson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks, but I understood him to be a man who stood by his principles.

Mr. Skinner: This is not the same Bill.

Mr. Thompson: But it is the same principle. The Bill would put restrictions on the people of Northern Ireland that the hon. Gentleman would never accept for people here on the mainland. When in opposition, the Labour Front Benchers said that they would repeal the 1986 Act, yet now they are the Government they have neither the guts nor the intention to do so. They have changed their principles and now seek to place greater restrictions on the people of Northern Ireland, such are their double standards. That just shows that the higher one goes in government, the lower one's principles become. The Labour Government should realise that.

Let me now deal with the Bill before us. It deals with an important principle that we have here on the mainland, which is that nobody—especially no Government—should interfere in the operational matters of the police. The Bill takes police operational matters out of their hands and places them with an unelected quango. We have plenty of quangos in Northern Ireland and the idea that one can have an independent quango in Northern Ireland is absolute nonsense. One can become a member of a quango in Northern Ireland only by showing oneself to be so-called apolitical, or one of the great and the good, or one who is somehow superior to everybody else, especially elected representatives. Most of the people on the Northern Ireland quangos have a deep antipathy to elected representatives and to the ordinary people of Northern Ireland.

We find that the restrictions that can now be placed on parades are absolutely wide. The Bill states:

"The Commission may issue a determination in respect of a proposed public procession imposing on the persons organising or taking part in it such conditions as the Commission considers necessary."

In other words, if the commissioners do not like the people who are parading or what they stand for, they can place restrictions on the parade. It is wide open: those who are disliked can be stopped from parading—that is what the Bill would allow.

Another great problem is that the Bill would reduce the powers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. If the commission makes a decision and the parade is about to begin or has started, the police will have fewer powers than they have now, because they will no longer have the powers under article 4 of the 1987 order. We shall therefore find that there is more trouble, not less. The commission will be able to operate various restrictions. It will issue guidelines or a code of conduct, some parts of which are ridiculous, but those who seek to hold a parade will have to abide by them or face restrictions on their parade.

The Bill would give powers to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that, as I understand it, even the Home Secretary on the mainland does not have. The Secretary of State will, of her own volition, be able to ban a parade in Northern Ireland. As I understand the law on the mainland, only certain types of parade can be banned here; but under the Bill a single, specific parade can be banned. That power can be used indiscriminately or against particular Orange parades.

The commission has published certain procedures that it intends to follow. We are told that it will go around the various controversial areas and that it will then give a preliminary indication of what will happen in those areas. I can think of no more ridiculous action that the Parades Commission could take. What will happen in the spring if the commission says that a particular parade will not be allowed to go ahead? Those opposed to the parade will foregather; those in favour of it will gather. Far from ameliorating the problem, this will make it worse. There will be a greater likelihood of confrontation and disorder.

There are many who think that an accommodation can be reached in such circumstances. When the Prime Minister met the leader of Sinn Fein last week, I understand that there were two opposing crowds outside 10 Downing street. Can anyone imagine an accommodation between those two demonstrations? It is folly to think so. Equally, it is folly to imagine an accommodation being reached between those who believe in law and order and who march according to the law in a peaceable fashion and those who seek, for political reasons, to break up those marches. It is wholly naive to suppose that a harmonious conclusion can be reached—

Mr. Öpik: Surely in such circumstances those seeking to have a peaceful demonstration will be protected by the Bill and those seeking to do evil will be prevented from carrying out their evil-doing.

Mr. Thompson: Would that what the hon. Gentleman says were true. In practice, it is those upholding the law on peaceful parades who get stopped, and it is the law breakers whom the police are accommodating. We need no change in the law of Northern Ireland. We want the police to apply the law just as it is applied on the mainland.

When people on the mainland want a parade, they go along to the police and agree the route with the police, and then the parade is policed by the police. No one gets near it; no one is allowed to interfere with it, or sit down in the road and stop it. People know that they cannot get away with disruption, so the parades go off peaceably.

In Northern Ireland, by contrast, the police stop parades and give in to the law breakers. That is why we have a problem: the law breakers have found that if they sit down in the street, or threaten to do so, the parade will be stopped. All that we need is the impartial application of the law by the police. People need to know that they cannot get away with obstructing a parade. That is the only way to solve the issue in Northern Ireland.

It is stupid to suppose that an accommodation can be reached between people who are opposed politically and in many other ways. I recall that the Secretary of State tramped around Drumcree meeting every conceivable person, but in the end she could not produce an agreement either. And in Londonderry even the leader of the SDLP could not, for all his efforts, produce an agreement. One cannot reconcile irreconcilables. The only way to peace is to treat everyone the same way, equally under the law. The law breakers, whoever they may be, must be dealt with by the police and must know that they will not succeed.

The Bill will not solve the problems of Northern Ireland; it will accentuate them. For 25 years, we who are elected have come here and told the Government what they should do, but they ignore our advice, which is why our problems persist. I know that time is limited today, so I thank hon. Members for listening attentively to what I have had to say.

7.14 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I was not aware of any time limits on the debate, but I do not intend to detain the House unduly, for several reasons. The first is that the background to the legislation belongs to the previous Government. I am mindful also of the co-operation given to the Opposition by the Government in another place and of the fact that the Government looked kindly on many of the Opposition's amendments. I pay tribute to Lord Dubs for his co-operation. I am sure that that co-operation will be maintained when we take the Bill into Committee in the new year.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) said, the work behind the Bill began with the severe public disorder in Northern Ireland during the summer of 1996, especially, but not exclusively, at Drumcree. The then Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, announced on 15 July 1996 the establishment of a review body comprising Dr. Peter North, the Very Rev. John Dunlop and Father Oliver Crilly to make recommendations on the future management of parades. I take this opportunity to praise the work of that review body, which produced a long and well-argued document containing some 43 recommendations. Interestingly, not all those recommendations have been incorporated in the legislation—a point to which we shall return in Committee.

Sir Patrick Mayhew made a statement in the House on the North report on 30 January 1997, and the then Government accepted all the seven principles that the report proposed as the basis for future development of the processes and procedures governing parades.

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

In their final paragraph, the authors of the report defined their proposals as having been designed

"to provide all the interested parties with the mechanisms and opportunities to work towards mutual understanding and local accommodation".

That is a worthy aim with which we can all agree.

The authors said:

"We would be delighted to look back in five years and wonder why it was felt necessary to propose such major changes in legislation that address the problems of public order rather than promoting the community benefits of shared celebration, in the light of the subsequent positive development of Northern Ireland society."

Wise words indeed. The twin-track approach is vital.

Let us not lightly set aside the fact that these are major changes. As Sir Patrick said in his statement of 30 January:

"the proposal that an independent body should . . . take over the RUC's decision-making power in respect of parades is a radical and far-reaching one."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 508.]

After his statement, the Secretary of State pledged to take the North proposals out to consultation. That yielded some important common strands of agreement. First, there was encouragement for parties in disputes to reach local accommodations. People felt that it was not right for the police to make and then enforce decisions regarding parades. They felt that there was a role for an independent advisory or decision-making body. There was support for principles and processes that would provide greater information about parades, and there was a case for guidelines and a code of conduct to regulate the behaviour of participants and protesters.

The North review also conducted a survey of attitudes, with interesting results. Eighty-eight per cent. of respondents said that, in the event of a dispute, a negotiated accommodation should be sought. Seventy-nine per cent. said that, if an accommodation was not possible, a binding decision should be taken by someone else. Interestingly, in answer to the question who should take that decision, 49 per cent. said an independent commission, 29 per cent. said the police, 11 per cent. said the Secretary of State and 6 per cent. said the judiciary. Those percentages add up to about 95 per cent. of the people who were contacted: they all wanted a binding independent decision to be taken by someone. We shall work with the Government to move that process forward on the basis of the consensus shown by those findings.

I have several questions for the Under-Secretary of State. Under clause 7, the commission has powers to impose conditions on public processions, including powers to amend the proposed route and to restrict access to certain areas and places. However, there do not appear to be any rights of appeal against an adverse decision by the parade organisers, or rights to a reply within a certain time. Rights of appeal, if I may call them that, are available in clause 8 to the Chief Constable, who can appeal to the Secretary of State if there is concern in a public order context about a decision by the commission. If the Chief Constable may appeal, why do parade organisers who have an adverse decision taken against them not have rights of appeal?

Clause 7 lays the responsibility for complying with the conditions placed on a procession squarely on the shoulders of

"the persons organising or taking part in it",

but no responsibility is placed on the shoulders of the protesters or protest groups to act within a code of conduct. Such a proposal was made in the North report.

A key element of the Bill is how, in a specific case, the commission's determination is to be enforced. Clause 10 gives the Secretary of State powers to ban public processions or parades. We welcome the changes that were made to that clause in Committee in another place; the threshold triggering a decision by the Secretary of State to ban was enlarged to encompass

"serious public disorder or serious damage to property",

bringing the Bill into line with the public order legislation that is being superseded.

However, just as there is no balancing intervention under clause 7 for protesters or protest groups to abide by a code of conduct, there are no powers in clause 10 for the Secretary of State to ban a counter-demonstration if a parade has been deemed lawful by the commission but continues to be opposed by the protest groups, which seem determined to ignore the results of adjudication. That appears to be, at best, an oversight and, at worst, a serious imposition on one section of the community but not the other. If my reading is correct, the protest can go ahead and the perpetrators be charged under clause 13, or the threat is deemed by the Chief Constable to be so great that he intervenes under his option in clause 8, but that is simply a reaction to intimidation and threat.

I promised to be brief. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell said, we shall not oppose the Second Reading. We welcome the acceptance of the sensible and carefully thought out amendments made in another place. However, we still believe that the Bill is capable of improvement and we shall seek the co-operation of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), and the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who we hope will find ways of accommodating us in Committee.

7.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tony Worthington): I am aware of a conflict between my obligations to hon. Members who want a response to points that they have made and to all other hon. Members, who want brevity.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. A fair number of points have been made. I shall try to deal with as many of them as possible, but a good many of them were Committee points.

We all know that the word "parades" is invested with a significance for both sides of the community that can sometimes seem mysterious to people on the mainland. There is bitterness and distrust—well evidenced tonight by the speech by the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson)—on both sides about the issue. We are seeking to create new structures to tackle the disputes. We hope that eventually those new structures will win the allegiance of all.

The events of the past few years have been unacceptable. The rule of law must prevail in the United Kingdom. Some disputes have made people realise that

the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 contained a perverse incentive by making it possible for the group that threatened to create most mayhem to get what it wanted. That is not acceptable in any part of the United Kingdom.

If we believe in the rule of law, we must face up to the fact that when any law—including the one before us—is passed, after a full debate and full consideration in Committee, a duty rests on all hon. Members to support the law. That is an aspect of equality before the law, and I trust that all hon. Members will uphold that duty.

I endorse the tributes that the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) paid to what happened in the other place. For the sake of brevity, I shall not list the people who were mentioned, but I believe that all their lordships made useful contributions.

I believe that, as the hon. Member for Bracknell implied, the core of the Bill is in clause 7, which is well expressed in terms of balanced rights and responsibilities. Many of the contributions that were made by Unionist Members caused me to think that every time they spoke they strengthened the argument for an objective independent commission. The issue is political; it is about force; it is about territory. I do not believe that the police should be dragged into a quasi-political issue; they have said that that makes their lives intolerable, so we must find an alternative.

I support the comments about the contribution of the police, who have been placed in a no-win situation. However difficult it is, we must—as the hon. Member for Bracknell said in a good contribution—build consensus in the House, as was done in another place. We shall conduct the Committee stage in this Commons in a similar spirit of trying to improve the Bill.

I said that the hon. Members who spoke from the Unionist side seemed to strengthen the case for a commission, but I emphasise how much the Bill is not an anti-parades Bill. What emerges from the North report, and what all Labour Members believe, is that a balance should be achieved between rights and responsibilities. There has never been, in any country, at any time, the right to march where one likes, when one likes—and there should not be. What exists is a right to process and a right of assembly, but we must always take other people into account.

In the past few years, it has become obvious that we must take the Royal Ulster Constabulary out of the judgment about what can be allowed under what conditions. I resist what was said by the hon. Member for West Tyrone; we are not removing the Chief Constable's powers to decide how to police. The operational freedom on the day is still there, and must be there, to react to the circumstances. We are merely performing a traditional role of the House, and of judicial or quasi-judicial bodies: setting the framework within which the police operate.

Mr. Thompson: Is it not a fact that under the Bill the power of the police reverts to what it was before 1936? Their power to ban parades will be under common law; they will have lost the statutory law in that respect.

Mr. Worthington: I am concerned with the current situation. The past few years have shown us that the 1987 order was not adequate and we must tackle that issue.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), who is not in his place, said that all existing traditional parades should be allowed, but that new parades should be looked at carefully. Clearly, that would be difficult to enshrine in law, particularly once we have incorporated the European convention on human rights into our law. The fact that a parade is new would not allow different considerations to be applied to it and a moment's thought would show that we could not have a law whereby certain practices were allowed for traditional but not non-traditional parades.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) raised a couple of important issues. He was right to say that this is about human relationships—that most difficult and obstinate of characteristics. In the end, it comes down to whether people are willing to accommodate differences. We do not claim that the Bill is the answer, because any law can be broken by people who are not willing to accommodate it, but it is a step forward.

The hon. Gentleman raised points of detail about clause 2(2)(a) and (b), which grant two powers to the Parades Commission: the first is mediation and the second is determination. That is exactly the sort of issue that can be thrashed out in Committee. One can see why that is proposed—because of the involvement of the commission—but one can also see that there could be a confusion of identities. That must be explored in Committee.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill gave powers to the Secretary of State and asked why she could not have that responsibility taken away from her. We must accept the fact that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is ultimately responsible for law and order in Northern Ireland, and one cannot take that power away. She is also referred to in terms of the mechanisms for parliamentary scrutiny of various aspects of codes with which she must deal.

I am delighted to see the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in his place. I pay tribute to him for being in his place, for reasons that he knows. I have already dealt with some of the issues that he raised. He asked why the penalties under the Bill had not been equalised before. That is another matter which was dealt with in another place. It is simply a re-enactment of the provisions in the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, in which their lordships saw that there was an inconsistency. That is generally welcomed. The hon. Gentleman also said that it should be an offence to break up a lawful parade. It is already an offence to do so by virtue of article 7 of the 1987 order, which will be re-enacted in clause 11.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) raised a number of issues. I agree with his first point that civil rights should not be pushed to one side. That goes back to the point about the balance between rights and responsibilities.

My hon. Friend asked why bands should be registered. That is taken as a reserved power. It was felt that there could be circumstances in which one might need the force of law if bands misbehaved in a particular way. He asked whether Scottish bands going to Northern Ireland would have to be registered. If we introduce that power, those bands will have to be registered, but it will depend on whether the power is taken. We hope that it will never have to be taken. We note my hon. Friend's comments about the need for someone with a legal background to be on the Commission.

[Mr. Worthington]

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) raised a number of issues. We welcome the support that he has given to the Bill. I have already given assurances about the conduct in Committee. We noted the point that he made—Lord Alderdice also made it—about package measures for parades. I admit that when I first became involved with this issue it seemed an attractive proposition to introduce restrictions if a number of parades take the same route each year. However, I am advised, and I see the sense of it, that once we have incorporated the European convention on human rights into our law, problems will arise in terms of accountability for each parade. Moreover, it might be difficult to implement the measure in terms of offences. However, that is a Committee point, as are the hon. Member's questions about annual reports and scrutiny within the House.

I am convinced that the Bill is a step forward, but, like all Bills that the House passes, it will depend on the consent of the people. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) say that polls show that an overwhelming percentage of people within Northern Ireland want independent arbitration to be introduced. They realise that the police have been put in an impossible position. The overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland detest seeing the rule of law threatened or the law being broken.

This year's marching season was less damaging than last year's because many statesmanlike decisions were taken, which shows that it is possible to achieve accommodation on this difficult issue. The Labour party is not naive about the forces that are at work, but we believe that we must act above all in the interests of the great majority of law-abiding people in Northern Ireland, who want to stay at home during the marching season rather than have to take their holidays then because of the threat to them. They want the rule of law to be asserted. The structures that we are putting in place will help that to happen. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 7.

Division No. 124] **[7.38 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Byers, Stephen
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Pickles, Eric
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Spellar, John
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Watts, David
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Janet Anderson and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Paisley, Rev Ian
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Thompson, William
Trimble, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John D. Taylor and
Mr. Roy Beggs.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

PUBLIC PROCESSIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of that Act.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Hospital Services (Brentwood and Ongar)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

7.49 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise an important constituency matter. I assure the Minister that I do not intend to speak for my allotted time of two and three quarter hours: I shall try to persuade him that the matter should be examined thoroughly without detaining him from sending letters to Santa Claus.

I speak on behalf of the whole community. All political parties are united against the threat posed to my constituents and their health. I have also received support from all the churches in the Brentwood and Ongar area. I am in an unusual position tonight, as the research for this debate has been conducted by Labour and Liberal Democrat as well as Conservative councillors. Perhaps that goes to prove that, in times of adversity, Brentwood and Ongar sticks together.

I have three concerns about community medicine in my constituency: first, the removal of beds from the Ongar War Memorial hospital; secondly, the closure of the minor injuries unit at Brentwood community hospital; and, thirdly, the closure of High Wood hospital services to the elderly. Those three measures are a response either to a lack of finance or to an overspending on budget, depending on one's point of view. The three hospitals have not contributed to the overspend, and the proposed savings are relatively small.

This debate is about the place of community or cottage hospitals in the modern health service and the disadvantages suffered by two small towns that are situated on the fringe of two health authorities. The Ongar War Memorial hospital was established in response to the first world war. Shock at the number of casualties from that conflict prompted communities throughout the land to seek ways of remembering the dead and of recognising the contributions of their neighbours and friends. Ongar decided upon a unique cenotaph—a living monument: a hospital. The money was raised by public donation. Hon. Members should understand that Ongar is not a particularly prosperous community, but it is a committed community that is tremendously proud of its hospital. That commitment continues today, and the hospital's League of Friends has raised almost £1 million—some £920,000—in 1996 prices over the past 17 years.

The hospital is held in high esteem by my constituents. It provides a variety of services, including speech and language therapy sessions, hearing and development checks, a baby clinic, ante-natal classes, relaxation classes, parentcraft classes, mental health services with the community psychiatric nurse, chiropody and podiatry. It offers day care and currently puts 16 beds to various uses.

I have received many letters from ex-patients of Ongar hospital or, more often, from their children. They talk of the enormous care and dedication of the staff and the importance of the hospital to the people of Ongar. I shall sum up that depth of feeling by quoting from one letter from a constituent. The impression is often created that

[Mr. Eric Pickles]

the hospital predominantly provides services to the elderly. While such services are important, they are just part of the role of that community hospital. My constituent Miss Karen Dunning writes:

"I spent a week in Ongar War Memorial as I am a diabetic and my GP thought it would be a good idea to place me in hospital for a week to try to get my diabetes under control. I was so pleased that Ongar Memorial found me a bed as it enabled me to not be too far away from my family. Up to this time I thought the hospital was mainly for the elderly—somewhere for people to die. I was very wrong—during that week I got involved with all sorts of people coming in and out of the hospital. It was a real eye opener. Not only does the hospital provide for the sick and dying it also provides a place for people with special needs to go for the day. Giving their family/guardians that much deserved break".

Some 46 per cent. of beds are occupied by general practitioner admissions, 22 per cent. are dedicated to respite care, 12 per cent. are occupied by patients transferred from other hospitals, 8 per cent. are for terminal or palliative care, and 4 per cent. are dedicated to emergency psychiatric cases. As those figures and Miss Dunning's letter show, it is clear that the majority of patients are sent to the hospital by their GPs. Some 75 per cent. of patients come from North Essex health authority and 25 per cent. from South Essex health authority.

A large number of patients come from South Essex because of a historical accident in drawing up the boundaries of the health authority. Many of the old parishes in the former rural district council of Ongar fall within the boundaries of South Essex health authority. Hon. Members must understand that the hospital covers 100 square miles of rural Essex in my constituency, and serves not just the town of Ongar but the communities that surround it.

Travel in the area is not easy, and not all patients have access to private cars. Many people must rely on public transport, which is sometimes non-existent in rural areas. There have been attempts to close Ongar War Memorial hospital in the past, and the hospital was saved last time by the late Richard Crosland when he was Secretary of State for Health. The hospital has grown since then and plays an increasingly important role in the community.

Only 18 months ago, Essex and Herts Community NHS trust considered the future of Ongar War Memorial hospital. Having stated its high regard for the hospital and recognised the high-quality care that it provides, it went on to consider the hospital's future. I emphasise the fact that the review was conducted only 18 months ago—the ink is still wet on the consultation document. The report states:

"The remit of small hospitals serving local communities varies considerably, but should address local health and community needs.

Given the obvious challenges to be faced in the future, Essex and Herts Community NHS Trust together with local professional colleagues, agencies, the League of Friends and the local community, wish to firmly establish the future of Ongar Hospital as a unique and fundamental provider of locally based health care services in its own right."

It is that fundamental nature of the health service in Ongar that it is so important to preserve.

That view should be shared by the House. What was true in 1995 must surely be true in 1997. The 1995 report took into account the fact that if beds are removed from one part of an area, pressure is put on beds in another part. That process takes pressure off, for example, beds within Princess Alexandra hospital. The report stated that there was

"potential for the transfer of patients from Princess Alexandra and other district general hospitals to Ongar War Memorial Hospital thereby helping to relieve pressure on acute beds in these former sites."

No one knows how difficult this winter will be. We know, however, that beds in Ongar will play an important part in relieving pressure on the rest of the health service in the Essex area.

A working party has been considering the various options for the future of the hospital since July. Curiously, the figures have varied enormously. Surely the authority should know two basic figures: the cost of care and the cost of the savings that it is proposing. The figures have been revised almost weekly. They have the same consistency that the late Senator McCarthy produced in making claims about the number of communists within the State Department.

I could take the Minister through a long and convoluted route of how changes have taken place. However, I can see a look of despair in his eyes. Instead of taking that route, I shall summarise. We started with a total cost of care per year of £602,000. That figure fell to £545,000. It then dropped to £406,000. Eventually, it increased to £478,000. Similarly, savings have varied between £107,000 and £14,800. Surely, that is worrying. If a hospital is to lose its beds, there must be certainty about figures. Figures should not be produced on a whim.

It is curious that members of the working party tell me that the health authority has a rather strange way of organising its budget. The working party was told with great pride that the authority always under-budgeted. Apparently, it always submits a figure that is lower than the one that it thinks will succeed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the authority's budget is always exceeded. It is rather like those irritating people whom we occasionally meet in life, who insist on putting their watches ahead by five minutes so that they will never be late. Eventually, they begin to rely on those extra five minutes.

Once the authority's procedures are known, clinicians rely on the fact that the figures in the budget are not those that will actually be needed. They know that the overall figure will be lower. The result is that the budget will always be exceeded. Surely that is not a sensible approach. As a result, my constituents are having to face cuts.

There is a need to be certain about the figures. However, there is only one certainty, and that is that there is no certainty about the figures. Perhaps there is one certainty: the Deputy Prime Minister was right when he said that we have closed too many cottage hospitals in the past. That being so, the proposed closure of Ongar War Memorial hospital is a throwback to bad decisions in the past.

There is an alternative approach, which would make use of beds and fulfil the needs of all the clinics. It would be necessary to examine the protocols for general practitioners' admissions and to provide £65,000-worth of refurbishment. The local League of Friends has promised a substantial donation. Indeed, it has promised £47,000, which would go a considerable way to meeting the total cost.

Discussions took place with the county council, which inspected the hospital and was very impressed. I have a letter from Mr. Robin Rennie, who is the head of community care services of Essex county council. He visited the hospital and was most impressed with what he saw. He wrote:

"A project involving joint commissioning for Older Peoples Services are, in my view, long overdue in Essex and there may be a considerable attractiveness in considering such a project in the Ongar area. I have also ensured that there will be a specific section in the new Community Care Plan which highlights particular difficulties in rural areas and the sort of imaginative solutions that might be considered to overcome these local difficulties."

It is my view, and it appears to be Mr. Rennie's, that that is exactly the imaginative proposal that should be applied to projects for the care of the elderly within the Ongar area of my constituency.

What is said about the Ongar area of my constituency is also true about Brentwood. The minor injuries unit at the community hospital was described in one of the local newspapers as the "town's best kept secret". The unit relieves pressure on the accident and emergency unit. There is only one small sign on the main road directing my constituents to a modern, clean and brightly decorated unit, which is run well by an efficient staff.

A mere 7,000 patients a year come to the unit—it has really only just started. That number represents only a fraction of what could be achieved. Many people are not aware of the unit's existence. Those who are come into contact with it only when they receive an injury.

The accident and emergency unit at Harold Wood hospital is currently closed. The alternative, for my constituents, is a difficult and long journey to the inaccessible A and E unit at Oldchurch hospital. When the new minor injuries unit was opened, it was hailed as the coming thing. It was said that it represented the future. We were told that such units would take pressure off serious A and E cases and would reduce working time. It was claimed that they would offer help where a simple dressing, a splint or a stitch was necessary. It was said that they would offer an alternative to which general practitioners could refer.

Any of us who have visited an A and E unit know that the hard truth is that the majority of people who go to them should not have done so and instead should have gone to their general practitioner or sought medical help elsewhere. It is often frustrating to see people with minor injuries, nevertheless painful, having to wait for long periods because more serious cases are coming through. That is why the minor injuries unit was so useful.

It appears that someone in the south Essex area does not like minor injuries units. There are two other units, one at Purfleet and the other at Orsett. They are well used and will remain open for the time being. However, their opening hours will be reduced. Indeed, they will be open only when GPs' surgeries are closed. I cannot help but feel that that is a cynical manoeuvre.

If we create uncertainty about the opening hours of minor injuries units and reduce the number of people who are involved, it might well be said this time next year, "The minor injuries units in Purfleet and Orsett are not being used." The fate of Brentwood today could well be that of Purfleet and Orsett next year.

Running through the closure of Ongar and the minor injuries unit, and the problems at High Wood, is the impression that minds are already made up; that, despite fairly expensive consultation and full-page advertisements in a local newspaper, people are just going through the motions. Meetings on closures are held in rooms that are deliberately small, so that people who are concerned cannot get in. We have a meeting tomorrow in Brentwood to consider the minor injuries unit and High Wood hospital. The meeting was arranged for the last weekend before Christmas, with the feeling that the public would not turn up. I think that we shall be surprised tomorrow night.

Brentwood, which is bearing the bulk of the proposed closures—two of the units are within my constituency—feels strongly that if better use were made of the minor injuries unit, it would relieve an enormous amount of pressure on the national health service and reduce waiting time. The suggested savings of £132,000 seem small in comparison to the overall budget. Indeed, all the closures do not amount to very much. I have to agree with Councillor David Gottesmann—a Liberal Democrat—the leader of Brentwood council, that

"the options concern a reduction in services rather than in bureaucracy."

At High Wood hospital, the proposals include the closure of Magnolia ward, Laurels ward and Brambles day centre, with 50 in-patient beds. It is not surprising that Mrs. Queenie Bishop, the chairman of Brentwood Age Concern, says:

"residents are shocked and unhappy at the news."

The consultation document says that the aim is to

"achieve the closure of the High Wood site."

Since the outcry, South Essex health authority has backpedalled on that. Julie Garbutt, the director of health care development for South Essex health authority, told a recent meeting of the community health council that the original document listing the options for saving money was "not accurate" when it stated that the aim was to achieve the closure of the High Wood site. She went on to say:

"We are not talking about the whole closure, we are talking about beds".

That is an interesting idea on how to create a more efficient hospital: do not close the hospital, just get rid of the beds. It saves on linen and also waiting times. I cannot help but feel that views on a hospital without beds are the same. The Ongar War Memorial hospital campaign group has a saying: "No beds equals no hospital."

The cuts are not about improving health services. They are not even about changes in health service needs in my constituency. Rather, they are about shifting resources from one area at the borders of two health authorities. The net result will be a reduction in services for the elderly and in community health services. It will increase bed blocking in my part of Essex, as well as the pressure on acute services.

The Government have a number of health service policies that I support. I agree broadly with the shift towards primary care, and with close partnership between GPs and local hospitals. Small cottage hospitals have a vital part to play in the overall team. I ask the Minister to spell out where community or cottage hospitals fit into the modern health service.

8.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on securing this debate. The issues that he raised are of concern to many of his constituents. Indeed, some of them have written to me, so I am personally aware of the difficulties in his area.

I echo one or two of the things that the hon. Gentleman said about the efforts of staff to maintain services in the NHS, particularly at this time of year. The truth—as we all recognise—is that, without the dedication and enthusiasm of health service staff, the NHS would simply grind to a halt. I know that they face many daunting tasks this year, but I have no doubt that they will undertake them commendably and with enthusiasm.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government share his aim of providing high-quality health care to the people of this country, wherever they live. He will be aware that, just last week, we published a White Paper on the future of the national health service, which set out the steps that we intend to take. We propose a 10-year programme of modernisation to ensure that the NHS is both modern and dependable.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman shares the Government's aim of switching resources from bureaucracy to front-line patient care. I do not think that many can argue with that proposition. I can assure him that, during this Parliament, we will move approximately £1 billion out of bureaucracy and into front-line patient services, which is arguably where it should have been in the first place.

The changes that we want to make will ensure a more responsive and dependable service to every community in this country. Community hospitals have a very important part to play in many parts of the country in a modern national health service. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman will be aware from the White Paper that community hospitals feature within the framework of the new NHS that we seek to fashion.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman is pleased with the Government's proposals, particularly to strengthen the links between primary care and the community health services that are provided by community and cottage hospitals in many parts of the country. That is where the future of community hospitals lies, in ensuring a stronger and better relationship between community health care and primary health care than perhaps has been the case.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of specific concerns about current and future consultation exercises. I think that it is fair to say that he is suffering from a bout of consultations. Most of the hospitals that serve his constituents are subject to consultation of one form or another. To the west, Harold Wood hospital serves the residents of the Brentwood area; to the east is Basildon; while within Brentwood are located Brentwood Community hospital, High Wood and Little High Wood hospitals, and Warley hospital. Finally, in the Ongar part of his constituency is the Ongar War Memorial hospital.

This whole area is one of significant challenges for the national health service. All the local health authorities face difficult decisions about how best to use finite resources. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, two are involved in consulting on "Options for Change".

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the future of Ongar War Memorial hospital is being consulted on by the North Essex health authority. I have listened to what he and other hon. Members have had to say about this hospital. As he is probably aware, I have had communications from members of the local community across the political divide about this matter. Let me stress from the outset the importance that the Government attach to ensuring that plans for service development are determined in an open manner, and that any changes that might happen should be implemented sensitively and appropriately.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the consultation period ends on 14 January 1998. Therefore, there is still time for those with concerns or suggestions about the proposals to make their thoughts known to the health authority. Only in that way can the health authority ensure that local ideas and suggestions are properly considered. That is true not just for Ongar War Memorial hospital but for all the other proposals that the health authority is considering.

I understand that the health authority's principal purpose in consulting on these changes is to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of care by reconfiguring services across north Essex.

As this consultation is still in progress, it would be inappropriate for me to speak in any detail about it. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, if the consultation is contested by any of the local community health councils, it will be for Ministers to make the final decision. Until then, I shall keep an open mind. However, I have listened extremely carefully to the hon. Gentleman.

It is particularly important when such proposals are being considered that the views and needs of local people are properly taken into account. We have a statutory responsibility to consult publicly and weigh the results fairly and carefully. When I say "we", I mean not just the Government but the local health authority as well.

The hon. Gentleman then discussed some of the changes recently mooted by the South Essex health authority affecting the Brentwood part of his constituency. I am aware that there is a particular problem in south Essex to do with the anticipated financial position of the health authority in the next financial year beginning on 1 April. South Essex has continued to be funded above the average for England. That has been true for a number of years, and it will be true next year as well. The health authority will receive a real-terms increase of around 2.3 per cent.

In addition, the Government have invested about £2 million this winter to deal with some of the particular pressures to which the hon. Gentleman alluded. Approximately two thirds of the money that has been made available for the winter months will be transferred directly to social services, particularly to deal with some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman addressed, such as bed blocking and ensuring that discharge arrangements are in place. Such arrangements will be particularly beneficial to elderly patients in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

However, as we know, resources are finite, and the health authority has put in train a process which is aimed at making services reflect the level of need, while keeping within the overall amount available to it.

South Essex health authority is conducting an informal consultation on the subject of change to acute and community services. Some of the health authority's proposals for change would affect the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I have seen a copy of the health authority's

public consultation timetable which was agreed with the local community health councils, which have played a constructive role.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, on 5 December a leaflet in the form of a newspaper wrap-round, conveying a number of health service options, was distributed to every household in south Essex. Residents will have until 16 January to make known their views on the present options. That can be done by attending public meetings, returning one of the questionnaires or phoning a free phone line.

On 22 January, the health authority will consider the feedback to enable it to determine the proposals to put out for formal public consultation. The second stage of the exercise will begin in February, and will last until the end of March. The health authority then proposes to meet in April to make its final decision. I hope that setting out the process that is to take place will be helpful.

As the informal consultation is still in progress, the same conditions apply to the review being carried out by the North Essex health authority. Again, I am not in a position to comment at this stage. It is unusual for Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box and have little to say, but I am bound by convention and by my obligation to ensure that, if the results of the consultation are contested, I can continue to demonstrate that I have an open mind and will consider the issue fairly and squarely.

I was concerned to hear the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the nature of some of the informal consultation exercises which have taken place thus far. However, there is no question whatever of anyone simply going through the motions. I expect it to be a proper consultation, and it will be. I have noted carefully the hon. Gentleman's concerns, along with those of the local council and others about the informal consultation, and I expect the South Essex health authority to take those concerns into account in considering its response to the formal consultation.

Consultations give rise to strong local feeling. Local people may feel that the proposals will have an adverse effect on the provision of health care in their area. That is not why consultations are undertaken. They are carried out to make substantial improvements, and should be for the benefit of local people.

I share the hon. Gentleman's determination to ensure that high-quality treatment and care are available to the people in the Brentwood and Ongar area. I am sure that the local NHS trusts, as well as the local health authorities, share that commitment. I strongly urge all interested parties in the local community to pass on their thoughts and comments on the proposals that are currently out to consultation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 December 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Welfare to Work

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Education and Employment Committee, The New Deal (HC 263); First Report from the Social Security Committee, Tax and Benefits: An Interim Report (HC 283).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

9.34 am

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights (Mr. Andrew Smith): I welcome this first opportunity that the House has had to debate the new deal for the young unemployed. I want today to set out the enormous progress that we have made and to listen to colleagues' comments on how things are going in their areas.

The new deal for the young unemployed is an important part of the much wider welfare-to-work strategy promised in our manifesto, in which we made very clear our determination not to continue with a permanent have-not class, unemployed and disaffected.

Welfare reform is essential, given the position that the Government inherited. There are 3.5 million families of working age with no one in work—nearly one in five households, compared with one in 12 in 1979. Long-term unemployment is almost double the 1979 figure. Youth unemployment is twice the national average. Two million people are on incapacity benefit; many of them would like to work but lack the opportunity to do so. Hundreds of thousands are denied child care. One million pensioners do not get even the help to which they are entitled.

Faced with that inheritance, we must modernise the welfare state. We do so according to the principles of opportunity and fairness that inspired its creation, by promoting work for those who can work and providing a better and fairer deal for those who cannot. We must provide skills for work, make work pay and create new job opportunities. Our starting point is that, for those who are able to do it, work is the best form of welfare.

The Government have moved fast and decisively to put welfare to work into effect. We have done so with the new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds, the new deal on the way for older people out of work for more than two years, the new deal for lone parents, the tax and benefits review, progress towards employment zones, and the new deal for disabled people and those with long-standing illnesses. That is a huge and radical programme of work, which will help to change people's lives for the better. There will of course be hard choices along the way, but the Government will not be deflected from reform which is essential for a stronger, fairer society in which we tackle social exclusion, open up opportunities to work and match rights with responsibilities.

Let me deal straight away with the anxiety and speculation that there has been about the review of benefits for sick and disabled people. Let me assure the House that it will be driven not by a cuts agenda but by our clear objectives of getting the right support to people who want to work and the right mix of cash and services to people who cannot work, so that they can live with independence and dignity. No one is talking about taking away benefits from those who need them.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): The Minister has just touched on an issue of great importance and interest to many people inside and outside the House. Can he give the House a categorical assurance that the Government will not table proposals to cut benefits in payment to qualifying disabled persons?

Mr. Smith: I have just made it clear that nobody is talking about taking away benefits from those who need them. With such a wide-ranging and fundamental review, it is important to set the right principles and objectives for it. Let me say what they are, because they underpin not just the review but our approach to welfare to work more generally.

Mr. Dorrell: The right hon. Gentleman may have heard Lord Ashley saying in Wales on the radio this morning that it is perfectly possible to have as the starting point of a benefits review the principle that qualifying disabled people should not suffer a cut in the benefits paid to them. Is that the basis on which the Government's review is taking place; or is that a reassurance that the Government are unable to give?

Mr. Smith: I say again: no one is talking about taking away benefits from people who need them. In a searching review, of course, the terms on which particular benefits are paid in particular circumstances have to be examined.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, with disability living allowance, for example, on inquiry, a quarter of assessments were found to be incorrect. Some people are being paid too little and some too much. In those circumstances, we cannot say that, as a consequence of a review, no one's benefits will decrease, but it is a question of getting and doing it right, according to principles that help people into work where they can work and, of course, provide the support that people need when they cannot work. Frankly, we will not take lectures from the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, whose party cut benefits to disabled people, blocked their civil rights and was clearly happy for disabled people who wanted to work to be trapped on benefit.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Let me make just a little more progress, as I am coming to the important question of the principles that underpin our review and the wider approach to welfare to work.

The first principle is inclusion. We want to enable people to make the most of their potential and to play a full part in society. Our approach is built around what

[Mr. Smith]

people can do, not what they cannot do, so the benefits review will reinforce the steps that we have taken, for example, on civil rights for disabled people.

Mr. Gibb: With regard to his previous outburst, will the Minister answer this question: which Government passed the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and introduced the disability living allowance?

Mr. Smith: Which Government left enforcement out of the Disability Discrimination Act, which this Government have pledged to rectify, by moving as quickly as possible to set up a proper disability rights commission to advise and enforce, and to ensure that disabled people can use their rights?

I was going through the principles that apply to our review. The second is fairness. We want to ensure that people receive help that is right for their individual needs. Thirdly, people should have independence and self-reliance, opening up opportunities to work for those who are able to, while, fourthly, effective support is provided to sustain and improve the quality of life for those who are incapable of work. Fifthly, there should be consultation. We shall not make changes without consultation. In particular, when we have options to consider, we shall consult disabled people, their organisations and others with an interest in the proposals before any changes are made.

The steps that we have already taken on disabled people's rights—our establishment of a ministerial task force and our pledges to implement part III of the Disability Discrimination Act and to establish a disability rights commission—have been widely welcomed. The new deal builds on that by opening up new opportunities for disabled people. In applying the £195 million that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer earmarked in the Budget, we have undertaken consultation and invited bids for innovative projects to improve personal advice and training support for disabled people moving into work and staying in work. They can include improvements to support for access, work trialling and job coaching. The projects will be carefully evaluated for more general application, and represent a big investment in opportunity for disabled people.

What is more, the new deal for the young unemployed gives particular help for disabled young people, including the choice of early entry into the programme, without waiting six months in unemployment, and advice and support that are tailored to the young person's needs. That flexibility and responsiveness to individual needs is a key characteristic of the new deal for the young unemployed as a whole. It is but one of a number of features that make the programme different and better than anything before.

I stress the importance of the gateway—the period of up to four months before taking up a new deal option, with the assessment, careers advice and help with basic skills that it offers, along with the availability of mentoring for people who can benefit from it most. To open up opportunity to all, help with child care will be available in all new deal options.

The new deal is different, because it offers tasters of the options—the chance for a young person to take up a place for a short trial period, to find out whether it is right for them. It is different, too, because it offers young people real work—work of real economic and social value: the best way in which to build the confidence and self-esteem that many young unemployed people need. The new deal is better resourced, with provision for personal advisers, the range of options that it offers and the offer not only of the subsidy to employers of £60 a week for six months, but of the contribution of £750 to train participants towards a qualification.

The new deal recognises that some people will need help to improve their basic skills before they can move into employment or further education and training. There is dedication to quality throughout, with proper monitoring systems and quality assurance, to make absolutely certain that high standards are achieved. The new deal is different, too, because it places real emphasis on improving employability. Each young person will have a personal action plan, with providers and trainers helping and, indeed, with the incentive to achieve it. From the start, we have emphasised that partnership is crucial to the new deal's success. Partnership was the foundation of the development of the new deal framework, and partnerships are the building blocks of its delivery.

The Employment Service has been charged with overall responsibility for the delivery of the new deal, and I have been struck by the energy and enthusiasm with which it has approached this huge enterprise. In its report on the new deal, the Select Committee on Education and Employment commended the continuing culture change that is being effected in the service.

Of course, the Employment Service cannot do it alone. The active support of local authorities, voluntary and environmental organisations, employers, trade unions, training and enterprise councils, further education colleges—in fact, the support of everyone in the community—is essential to make a success of the new deal, and we have been delighted with the commitment and enthusiasm that we have encountered.

I challenge the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) to tell the House whether he and his colleagues will now pledge that they will support making the new deal a success in changing young people's lives. I shall give way to him if he would like to tell us now that the Conservatives will support it. We look forward to him giving that commitment later, but with him or without him—

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's support.

Mr. Brady: On that point, will the Minister join me in congratulating the previous Government on having achieved so much for young people, by dramatically reducing the number of young unemployed over the past couple of years?

Mr. Smith: We had record unemployment among young people under the previous Government. When they left office, unemployment was twice the level that they inherited and youth unemployment was twice that in the rest of the population, so the best contribution that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues can make is to join us

in supporting the new deal and truly to make it a whole community effort. That is what it needs to be and that is what it is, given the amount of support that we are receiving throughout the community from all sections of society and, I have to say, from some Conservative Members who, in their feedback forms on the new deal's progress in their constituencies, are making it clear that they are committed to its objectives.

However, we want that to be matched by a commitment from the Conservative Front-Bench team, so that there will truly be a whole-nation effort behind a project that can transform the opportunities and prospects not merely for young people, but for their families, the communities in which they live and the economy as a whole.

Partnership is at the heart of the new deal and, of course, one of the most important partnerships is between society and the young person. We all have a responsibility to help young people to find a way out of unemployment through the provision of high-quality training and work, but the young person must meet us part way. We need to make young people aware of their responsibilities and, as we have said, there will be no fifth option of a life on full benefit.

Young people must give the new deal a chance. They will have a voice in shaping their own future, and the help needed to do it. They need to believe that the new deal will have something to offer them as individuals; something that will make a real difference to their prospects; something to renew their confidence and self-esteem. That is why every aspect of the design of the new deal must have quality built into it. For example, we have ensured that every participant has access to high-quality training—everyone must work towards an approved qualification.

We are determined, too, that every effort should be made to enable young people to build on their new deal experience. We have built in a follow-through strategy to help them improve their employability and to secure a job, if they have not already got one, once they have completed their new deal option.

As we have carried the project forward, it has been greatly informed by consultation at every stage. More than 600 firms attended the national events, and 3,500 individuals and organisations attended regional consultation, as well as many more at local level. That consultation was real; it made a difference. The views of those who attended those events made a significant difference to the design of the new deal, including greater emphasis on mentoring, the development of the self-employment opportunity and the involvement of the public sector in the employment option.

The new deal has benefited greatly from the work of the advisory group and the new deal task force, which includes several representatives from business, as well as from the voluntary sector, local government, trade unions and education. Ably led by Sir Peter Davis, they have been instrumental in helping us to develop the high-quality framework for the programme. They are also assisting with marketing and will be involved in helping to monitor the quality of delivery.

From business, we have seen enormous good will and enthusiasm for the ideas behind the new deal and an understanding that it will be good for business, as well as for our young people and the country as a whole. Employers have already made a superb contribution. They have contributed ideas and expertise to the detailed design and implementation planning of the new deal at national, regional and local levels. They have seconded key managers to help us to take the work forward—17 private sector secondees are now working with the Employment Service. At board and senior management level, they have been helping personally with the assessment of local delivery plans.

What is more, an impressive range of major British employers have expressed their support for the new deal. That runs across all sectors—from manufacturing, including Rolls-Royce, Unipart, Rover and British Aerospace, to services, including British Telecom, British Airways and the Business Services Association; from utilities such as Thames Water and General Utilities, to retailing, including Tesco, Sainsbury, Littlewoods and Marks and Spencer; from food and drink, including Northern Foods and Allied Domecq; to financial services such as Prudential, Abbey National and NatWest.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): That is all very valuable and encouraging, but have the Government had any success in trying to get below the level of some of the blue-chip companies? Of course the Government are right to start with the bigger, better organised businesses, but will the Minister give us an assurance that, once that has been done, he will move on, because the vast majority of employers in this country are small or medium-sized enterprises?

Mr. Smith: Indeed, and I am about to deal in the next part of my speech with the enormous progress that we are making on that level. I cannot resist saying that I welcome the hon. Gentleman's recognition of the value of the employer support that we are receiving. If the Liberal Democrats had had their way, with their opposition to the windfall tax, there would not have been the resources to pay for the programme, and it would not have been carried forward, with large or small employers.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is important that we get support from the full range of businesses—small as well as large. An enormous effort is being made, and will continue to be made, to build up still more involvement. We have established national account managers in response to requests from large employers, so that there is a single point of contact nationally. We are working systematically through the top 500 companies.

We are also working with employer organisations to agree arrangements for particular sectors such as construction and tourism. The Institute of Personnel and Development is working with us to distribute a special fact sheet on the new deal to 80,000 personnel and training managers. The national insurance and tax packs, which will go out to 1.2 million employers early in the new year, will all include new deal information.

The small and medium-sized businesses which are crucial to the success of the new deal will be receiving information, and there will also be a local marketing effort. We are paying particular attention to getting the message across to firms at local level. Local plans are building on the links that the Employment Service, chambers of commerce, training and enterprise councils and others have with small firms. That will be backed up by information and advertising.

[Mr. Smith]

To date, local partnerships have already contacted 60,000 employers through events, visits and letters. Already, 9,000 have undertaken to employ people through the new deal. We shall have contacted more than a quarter of a million employers by the end of February.

There has also been a high level of interest from the voluntary sector and environmental groups. We are seeking to build alliances between the smaller organisations, which might not have the capacity to deliver the options alone, so that they can also play a role. We have provided funding to support smaller voluntary organisations in the bidding process and, as contracts are awarded, we shall encourage the larger organisations that win them to work with the smaller ones, to ensure that the widest range of opportunities is available.

Energetic efforts have also been made to engage education and training providers in new deal delivery, both for the full-time education and training option and to provide the training that is an essential part of each of the three work options. The Further Education Funding Council has been a key partner in the development of the programme, and strong links are being built with the Association of Colleges and the Further Education Development Agency. The further education sector is well represented on local partnerships.

The spirit of involvement and working together is the spirit of the new deal. It characterises the other employment initiatives that we are taking as part of welfare to work, such as the employment zones that will help those over 25 who have been unemployed for a year or more. That is a new and innovative approach that will start in five pilot areas in February.

In those areas, local partnerships will tailor help to individuals, rather than simply imposing standard programmes, so that those individuals have the best chance of getting into work. Those employment zones are about people, not programmes. Each of the zones will include new proposals, decided locally, for improved training, work projects to benefit the community and business enterprise.

Despite falling unemployment, there are still concentrated pockets of high, long-term unemployment. Those are often areas where a lot of public money is already spent in the form of benefits, education, employment and regeneration programmes, the European social fund and money from local authorities. As well as providing extra resources—some £58 million across the five pilot areas—employment zones will enable local people to co-ordinate more effectively the use of the existing money, bringing new coherence and effectiveness to tackling concentrated unemployment. We shall be looking closely at the innovative features in employment zones, so that we can apply more widely the lessons of what works best in getting people into jobs.

We have achieved a lot in a few months, but we are by no means complacent. We are on course to deliver the new deal—a fortnight from now in the 12 pathfinder areas and in 15 weeks' time right across the whole country. But with a programme as complex and ambitious as this, there is always more to be done to ensure that we get it right. The invaluable work that so many hon. Members have been undertaking as ambassadors and advocates for the new deal will be even more important in the months ahead.

The test of welfare to work will be in its delivery and in its impact on the employability, and therefore the lives, of all the unemployed individuals it aims to help. Welfare to work and all the initiatives that are part of it have mobilised the support and enthusiasm of people from all walks of life. It also demonstrates our belief in a society in which we do not simply pursue individual aims but hold many goals in common, working together to achieve them.

Our welfare-to-work strategy will attack unemployment and the despair that it brings. It will break the spiral of escalating spending on social security, and it will be of lasting benefit to those taking part, to the community and to the economy. I commend it to the House.

9.59 am

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): Opposition Members are very pleased to have this debate, and I am sure that every right hon. and hon. Member agrees that reducing dependency on benefit and enhancing people's opportunity to work are important objectives. The Minister asked me whether the Opposition were committed to enhancing opportunities and enabling people to leave dependency. Of course the official Opposition—like, I suspect, all right hon. and hon. Members—share those objectives.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I have not made much progress yet, but I am happy to give way.

Mr. Smith: I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman so early, and I am grateful to him for giving way. I welcome his support for the Government's overall objectives. Will he tell us, therefore, whether he and other Opposition Front Benchers will pledge their support for the new deal for young unemployed people?

Mr. Dorrell: I have a speech to make yet, and not every element of it, the right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear, is uncritical endorsement of everything that the Government are doing. He has asked me to endorse the objectives of getting people off benefit and enabling them to return to work. I am very happy to do so, because that is a very widely shared objective. It is important that such objectives should be endorsed, because they are most critical for those who have endured long periods of unemployment.

Achieving those objectives is critical not only for young people—as the Minister stressed again in his speech and as the Government repeatedly stress as part of their welfare-to-work programme—but for those in later life and for lone parents. Those groups form other aspects of the new deal, about which he said rather less in his speech and about which I shall want to say more.

The key question that every right hon. and hon. Member must ask about the Government's new deal and welfare-to-work packages is not whether we share the objectives—we can take that as read—but whether, given the inevitable competition for resources, they are the most effective way of achieving those objectives. We should realise that the issues that we are debating today are

important not only to those who will benefit from improved labour markets and job opportunities but to the wider politics of Britain.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that achieving radical reform in the welfare system is a centrepiece of the Government's programme. He has stressed that point on several occasions this week. He is inclined to suggest, however, that reforming welfare is the same objective as achieving welfare to work, reducing welfare dependence and enhancing job opportunities. As he and the Secretary of State for Social Security discovered yesterday, the process of reforming welfare is broader than can be summed up in the rather glib soundbite "welfare to work".

The Prime Minister's difficulty was underlined in this week's *New Statesman* by the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), who wrote:

"It is self-evident that the majority of people, whether lone parents, the disabled or other groups, would prefer to earn an income than rely on state benefits. But work will not always be a realistic option and this is what went wrong on lone parents . . . As a strategy, welfare-to-work is quite well thought out and understood. Modernising the welfare state is not, and that is our central problem."

That was written by the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party.

The Prime Minister has no one but himself to blame for the difficulties in which he finds himself in trying to secure the consent and support of his Back Benchers for his programme for reforming the welfare state. The Government's and the Prime Minister's entire approach to the subject—particularly in much of what he has said about the new deal for the young unemployed, which is one of the Minister's specific responsibilities—has been typified by superficiality and naivety.

The Prime Minister has consistently implied that welfare-to-work programmes—the Minister's programmes—are self-financing. In February 1997, the Prime Minister said:

"we will reduce spending on the costs of unemployment and increase it on education. We will begin with the programme taking 250,000 young people off benefit and into work".

He tried to establish a link between increasing education spending and the welfare-to-work package by implying that implementing welfare to work will bring revenue savings that will allow him to increase spending on education.

On 3 April 1997, at the Labour party manifesto launch, the Prime Minister was at it again when he said:

"Education will be our number one priority; and we will increase the share of national income spent on education as we decrease it on the bills of economic and social failure".

Last week, an official in the Department of Social Security was at it again by writing the leaked memorandum that suggested that the Government's capacity to increase health and education spending depended on the welfare reform process releasing money for which the Department of Social Security is responsible.

Given such conjuring tricks, it is hardly surprising that voices are being raised against the Government on their own Back Benches. Some of the Minister's more battle-hardened colleagues realise that they are being offered an inherently implausible scenario. First the Prime Minister says that education will be paid for by savings achieved by the new deal, then the Minister for Welfare Reform says that increased charges for students will pay for £1.2 billion-worth of child care—

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Yes.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says yes, but I thought that other parts of the Department for Education and Employment had give assurances that those increased charges would be spent on higher education and further education. Although I think that they should be spent only on higher education, the Department has at least given an assurance that they are for higher and further education. However, it appears that some Labour Back Benchers still think—with the Minister for Welfare Reform—that that money will go into child care.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way after I finish this catalogue.

As we discovered last week, the Department for Social Security is also being charged with the task of finding savings in the cost of benefits for the disabled and the elderly to finance the cost of growing health and education expenditure. I asked the Minister twice during his speech whether he could assure disabled people in Britain that the Government will not cut benefit payments to qualifying disabled people, and twice he avoided the question. The Government's objectives are not wrong, but they are simply not prepared to come clean to the British people about their different objectives and about the necessity of reconciling those objectives.

When the Minister talks about the new deal programme for the young unemployed, he is not taking about a programme that will release money for spending on other desirable objectives. He should have the honesty to say so. He ought to recognise that the programme for which he is responsible is a programme of spending which, in the Government's view, is designed to improve the operation of the labour market. That is not a view with which I entirely disagree; it would be strange if I did, because the previous Government spent money on many similar schemes.

The programme involves the net spending of taxpayers' money. It does not release money for spending on something else—quite the contrary; it pre-empts money which, if not being spent on this programme, could conceivably be spent on something else. Therefore, to represent it as a programme that allows the Government to spend more on health, education or other social provision is a conjuring trick, as it does nothing of the kind.

The Government should be clear about the fact that the justification for the programme for which the right hon. Gentleman is responsible has to be made on the basis of the benefit it brings to the labour market and in the enhanced job opportunities that result. That is the test that the right hon. Gentleman sometimes accepts and sometimes does not. However, the Prime Minister apparently still believes that his programme is part of a wider reform that will release benefit from one element of public expenditure so that it can be spent on another.

Mr. Wicks: I do not quite understand the right hon. Gentleman's difficulty. On 1 May we inherited a social

[Mr. Wicks]

security budget that was rising to about £100 billion a year, or one third of total public expenditure. We are having to grapple with that mess. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that that £100 billion was being well spent? Is he pleased with the previous Government's distortion in spending all that money on the consequences of economic failure?

Mr. Dorrell: I am certainly proud of the fact that the previous Government enhanced spending on disabled people and provided them with a range and generosity of benefits that did not exist in 1979. I am not attacking the previous Labour Government, but those improved benefits were an element of the progress that we made during our 18 years in office. That is why I am now probing the Minister as to whether the enhanced benefits for disabled people, which we were responsible for introducing, are to be chipped away. If that is the case, it is about time that a Minister was prepared to defend that policy on its merits.

The key questions before the House are whether the programme for which the Minister is responsible is the best possible use of roughly £3.75 billion and whether it represents good value for money. They are the issues we should be focusing on. In answering those questions, I repeat that I agree with the Government about the benefit that can come from active labour market measures. I am prepared to be straight and say that they do involve some public expenditure. That was why the previous Government—*[Interruption.]* I see that economies are coming early. I am prepared to concede that a saving on electricity releases expenditure for something else. I am prepared to recognise and argue for the necessity for extra expenditure on active labour market measures.

The Minister rightly stressed the importance of the gateway element in his programme for the young unemployed. One of the questions asked by the Employment Sub-Committee, which is chaired by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), to which I would be interested to hear the answer, is, if the gateway principle is right for the young unemployed—I agree that it is—why is there not a similar principle in the elements of the new deal focused on the over-25s, where the same arguments apply? With that caveat, I agree with what the Minister said about the gateway element.

I also recognise that there can be a role for employment subsidies in the promotion and enhancement of work opportunities. That is why we launched the workstart pilots. Provided that they are highly targeted, and provided that some of the distortion and displacement effects of wage subsidies are recognised and controlled, there can be a role for them. There certainly can be a role for what I understand are now, in the awful jargon, called the intermediate labour markets but might more revealingly be referred to as voluntary sector employment or the environmental task force. I have no difficulty in principle with those or with the training option.

The basic principles of the Government's scheme are not necessarily wrong, but we have to consider the detail behind them. What stakes will the Minister set in the ground to define the scheme's objectives and, therefore, its success or failure? When the Labour party first spoke of the scheme for the young unemployed, it talked about taking 250,000 young long-term unemployed people off the dole. It can no longer use that as the definition of success, given that there are now only 122,000 young long-term unemployed who qualify for the scheme. The original definition of the scheme has had to be changed.

It should at least be a warning that a scheme that was designed several years ago with one very definite objective is substantively unchanged, although the objective has changed radically because it was achieved by the previous Government by another means. Since the date on which the Labour party announced its scheme, the previous Government reduced the number of the young long-term unemployed by 250,000 by ensuring more flexible labour markets—

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): They were fiddled figures.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman should be a little careful about adopting that argument. One of the things that at least some new Labour Members have been learning over the past few weeks is that the unemployment figures that are published every month are now the responsibility of the Labour Government. I have not noticed that they have been coming forward with any great haste to change the basis of those figures in a way that reflects the argument deployed by the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross).

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall be delighted to do so. Are we going to hear about a change to the basis of the unemployment figures?

Mr. Smith: Has the right hon. Gentleman abandoned what I had understood to be the previous Government's commitment to give more prominence to the labour force survey? We have made it very clear that we believe in giving it more prominence, as it is a more reliable and, indeed, internationally comparable measure of the levels of unemployment.

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with that proposition. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the labour force survey does not paint a significantly different picture. I was seeking to deal with the outburst of the hon. Member for Dundee, West, who was using old Labourspeak. The House will remember that, whenever the unemployment figures were published—the labour force survey figures or the monthly ones produced by the previous Department of Employment—Labour Members used to leap to their feet and say that they were fiddled. The Government are now using exactly the same figures on the same basis.

Mr. Ernie Ross: I have been a member of the Select Committee that deals with employment issues for the past three Parliaments and I have to say that what the right hon. Gentleman is saying is a pile of arrant nonsense. The Committee never disagreed with the labour force survey figures. We disagreed with the way in which the previous Government dealt with the claimant count and their suggestion that that somehow reflected the real number of people looking for work.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall not dwell on that. The hon. Gentleman now appears to recognise that the important

element in the argument is not the way the figures are constructed but the fact that over the past two years there has, according to the labour force survey and the claimant count, been a substantial reduction in the number of young unemployed people.

The original objective that the Labour party set itself when it published its welfare-to-work programme for the young unemployed, which was to take 250,000 young people off the unemployment register, was achieved by the previous Government. The new Government have had to redefine the objectives of what is still the same scheme. I was suggesting that that should be a cause for questioning by those of us who follow the matter.

Mr. Andrew Smith *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I want to make a little more progress.

I want to cite what the Minister said when pressed on the subject by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) in the Education and Employment Committee. My hon. Friend asked the Minister:

"Would it be a fair measure of success to say that we would have to see the current trend rate of decline of unemployment increase?"

The Minister started by not being very clear. He said:

"That does depend on assumptions about what is happening to the wider macroeconomy and, for that matter, the labour market . . . So that would be an oversimplification to put it like that."

My hon. Friend then pressed him:

"So you might be happy that you were getting value for money if the current trend was maintained, or even if unemployment rose?"

The Minister responded:

"Only if something devastating, which was unforeseeable, happened to the economy."

My hon. Friend then put it to the Minister:

"So, barring some devastating and unforeseeable action, you would expect the trend rate to be improved."

The Minister said:

"I would, yes."

The Minister's definition of success is an improvement in the declining trend rate. I should be grateful if he could confirm that that is his definition of success for his programme for the young unemployed. It is important to be clear about the Government's objectives for the scheme to which they are going to commit more than £3 billion of public money.

Mr. Smith: The measures of the programme's success will be: first, keeping our promise to get 250,000 young people off benefits and into jobs; secondly, significantly enhancing the employability of the young people who have undertaken work on the programme; thirdly, a higher level of youth employment and a lower level of youth unemployment than there otherwise would have been.

Mr. Dorrell: I am interested that the Minister does not appear to be confirming what he said to the Select Committee. When my hon. Friend said:

"barring some devastating and unforeseeable action, you would expect the trend rate to be improved",

the Minister replied:

"I would, yes."

Is the right hon. Gentleman changing that position?

Mr. Smith: If the right hon. Gentleman reads on in that Select Committee evidence, he will also see that I made it clear that, with the falling numbers in the client group, the proportion of those who are harder to help is increasing. We want the declining trend rate in youth unemployment to continue, but that becomes a bigger achievement as we get further towards those who are hardest to help. That has implications for the gateway and the wider support services involved in the new deal.

Mr. Dorrell: I must correct the right hon. Gentleman. I shall read on. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland then said:

"Minister, can we turn to the Employment Service and its preparation to deal with the New Deal".

It is not true that the Minister went on to say what he has just claimed. The Chairman of the Committee changed the subject. That is not surprising. The Select Committee was more circumspect in its report than was the Minister in setting the objectives.

Mr. Smith: It is important that such matters should be correct for the record. In my subsequent answer, I specifically referred to the previous question. It was clear that that was the question that I was answering.

Mr. Dorrell: The Minister went on to make points that he had already made but were not reported. I am not sure whether the House will have followed that contortion.

The Select Committee was more circumspect than the Minister in defining the objectives of the programme. The Committee was clearly concerned that, if success was defined too closely by a decline in the trend rate, it might be a difficult test to pass. Given that we are probably close to the peak of the economic cycle, the Select Committee is likely to be right.

The Committee, importantly, broadened the focus on the definition of the scheme's objectives. The Chairman said:

"we have taken certain evidence which suggests that, because unemployment has been falling pretty rapidly, the target group, which most of the money has been spent on, is diminishing and it might be better to focus the scheme, or to rebalance the scheme, to take more into account the longer-term unemployed."

The Chairman made it clear that he was reflecting evidence that the Committee had heard that the Government's programmes will spend the lion's share of the money from the windfall tax on the young unemployed.

The figures are revealing. The Chancellor announced that he would spend £3.15 billion on 18 to 24-year-olds during this Parliament. The Government have earmarked £350 million for over-25-year-olds who have been unemployed for more than two years. That is barely 10 per cent. of the money earmarked for the young unemployed. For lone parents, they have earmarked only £200 million. The focus of the welfare-to-work scheme remains heavily on the young unemployed, but the facts of the employment market have changed sharply.

Not only, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, has the number of long-term young unemployed people fallen sharply over the past couple of years, but the turnover rate of unemployed people—the number leaving the register

[Mr. Dorrell]

to go back to employment—is significantly faster among young people than among the older age group. On the most recent figures, there are more than 400,000 people between the ages of 40 and 55 on the unemployment register. The rate at which they are leaving the register to go back to employment is approximately two thirds of the rate at which younger people are leaving the register.

That is why the Chairman was right to point out that the changes to the labour market since the Labour party committed itself to the shape of the new deal some years ago might require a shift in the balance of the programme to offer more assistance to the older unemployed. There are serious social problems associated with long-term unemployment in the older age group.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Minister went on to concede that he would build sufficient flexibility into the programme to enable it to respond to the changing nature of the jobs market?

Mr. Dorrell: I was about to quote the Minister on that. I should like him to clarify what he meant when he said, in response to the Chairman:

"if the numbers of 18-24 year olds more than six months unemployed diminished significantly below that which in overall terms has been budgeted for, clearly that would release resources which could then be considered for reapplication elsewhere."

That is clearly what the Minister's brief said. When my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West asked the same question later—whether the shift in the balance of the labour market meant that the money allocated for the young unemployed could be shifted within the welfare-to-work programme to benefit the older unemployed—the Minister said:

"What I was saying was that, if as things develop you can see that you are well within the overall budget that had been provided, it follows logically that there could become resources available for reallocation."

The Minister's brief clearly said that, if he was asked that question, he could say that the resources were available for reallocation. His words do not tell us whether the money would be available for reallocation within the welfare-to-work programme or for reallocation by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on a wide range of other Government spending programmes. Is welfare to work a £3.7 billion programme with priorities that may shift between the young unemployed, the older unemployed and lone parents, or was the Minister telling the Select Committee that, if the money allocated to deal with the young unemployed was found to be more than necessary, it would be taken away from his Department and reallocated by the Treasury? That is an important question that his evidence did not answer.

The details of the rules of the Government's scheme also raise value for money issues. The most obvious unintended effect of the scheme is the deadweight cost associated with any wage subsidy programme. To what extent is it anticipated that the scheme will pay employers to do what they were going to do anyway?

When National Economic Research Associates looked at 17 schemes in 10 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development with similar wage subsidy characteristics, it concluded that up to 50 per cent. of spending on wage subsidies could be deadweight. NERA also said that only 10 to 30 per cent. of the expenditure on those wage subsidy programmes would result in extra jobs. That led it to conclude that it was

"ultimately somewhat sceptical about the likely effectiveness of a permanent full-scale wage subsidy programme."

When the Select Committee asked the Minister about that issue, he did not dissent from the proposition that deadweight costs could be between 25 and 50 per cent. of expenditure. Given that the Government are suggesting that a substantial sum of public money should be spent on the programme, we need to know in far greater detail what plans they have to control the level of deadweight, and what level of deadweight expenditure they would find acceptable. Presumably there is a level at which the Government would conclude that the deadweight expenditure was such that the money would be better spent in the interests of the people on whom it is targeted on a labour market programme or on another programme.

More insidious than the deadweight issue is the problem that the welfare-to-work programme may encourage people to do things that are slightly different from what they would have done otherwise. The changes brought about as a result of the scheme may be undesirable. Let us consider the young unemployed person who has been unemployed for five months. If that person finds someone who wants to employ him, is it not in the interests of both parties to delay the employment contract for a month, at which time the young person will qualify for the £60-a-week subsidy under the Government scheme? Nobody would regard that as a desirable result. What safeguards will there be to prevent such distortions?

There are worse possibilities. Let us consider the young person who is thinking of attending a further education course on terms that are available to the whole community. Is it not in that young person's interest, in some circumstances, to wait for six months on the unemployment register to qualify for the more generous terms that are available under welfare to work? Surely that would be a perverse effect of the Government's programme.

Let us consider the case of an employer who is considering recruiting a young person. We can take as the control case the 18-year-old who has just left employment or who is still in employment and considering changing his job. If a person between 18 and 24 has been unemployed for more than six months, he will be £60 cheaper to the employer. That is the five months argument with which I have already dealt.

Let us consider the case of an employer who is considering taking on a 16 or 17-year-old instead of the 18-year-old control case. One of the perverse effects about which the Government need to be careful is a result of the provision in the Teaching and Higher Education Bill which imposes on the employer of the 16 and 17-year-old the obligation to cover the cost of a day a week on a training course. The employer does not have the same cost obligations with an 18-year-old. We need to know that the Government have thought through the different cross-subsidies and the incentive effects of various programmes taken together.

Of course I do not believe that the Government's objectives are wrong; we share their objectives. We all want enhanced job opportunities, linked to training to

improve the output potential of young people and of all people who are currently unemployed. That is a shared objective.

We are concerned about whether the details of the Government's programme have been sufficiently clearly thought through. In considering such programmes, we need to remember that they are being implemented against a background of low and falling unemployment, by historic standards and by the standards of most of our OECD competitors. We need to recognise that there is a danger that the structure of the Government's schemes will have a number of unintended and undesirable side effects.

The most important question is whether this programme represents the best possible use of £3.7 billion, given all the competing claims on expenditure. If it is claimed that this programme is part of a general programme of welfare reform which will release money from one part of the welfare budget so that it can be spent on another, that is a fraud.

When Labour Members go through the Lobby next year to vote for the Prime Minister's programme of welfare reform, they should remind themselves that the previous Government achieved Labour's target of a 250,000 reduction in the number of long-term young unemployed. They must ask themselves whether the £3.75 billion that the Government are committed to targeting on an objective that has already been achieved by the previous Government is being used in the best possible way, particularly against the background of cuts and other restraints that it is the inevitable lot of Government Back Benchers to have to support.

10.35 am

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who is doing his job as Opposition spokesperson. All the questions that he has raised are perfectly legitimate. It is important for our democratic process that we have a vigourous Opposition, and good government is made even better through proper probing by the Opposition and by Select Committees.

Some of my colleagues would have taken some of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks rather more seriously if the previous Government had shown a real intention to address the problem. Who put unemployment up in the first place over 18 years or so? The right hon. Gentleman has the audacity to claim that his Government achieved this Government's objective during the last few months of their time in office. He went a bit over the top at that point.

Mr. Brady: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: I am just beginning my speech, and I know that many of my hon. Friends want to contribute to the debate.

I would have been a little more kindly disposed towards the right hon. Member for Charnwood if I had heard him express the sentiment expressed by one of his predecessors, Lord St. John of Fawsley, whom I distinctly recall saying, when he was Leader of the House, that unemployment was a moral and social evil. Many of us came to this House to ensure that that moral and social evil was totally abolished, and I am proud that the Labour Government have addressed the problem with a tremendous amount of political will and with great ambition. I am proud that they are prepared to drive through this part of the programme with great flair and imagination.

I was rather critical of the idea that the Employment Service was the appropriate body to do the job, however, as the enforcement agent of a pretty harsh benefits regime seemed unlikely to be able to transform itself into an all-sharing, caring organisation which could assist young people in negotiating their way into employment, education and training. I will now repeat what I said yesterday to the chief executive of the Employment Service. I said that the culture change required within his organisation to make it fit to drive through the programme is seriously under way. The staff at my local jobcentre at Bishop Auckland are implementing the new programme with enthusiasm and a sense of liberation. We owe a debt of gratitude to Leigh Lewis and his staff.

I should also refer to the commendable flexibility that the Government insisted should be written into the design of the programme. It would have been excusable for a Government with such an ambitious programme to lay down the law pretty rigidly from the centre. That could have got the programme off to a good start, as everyone would have known exactly where they stood. However, the Government rightly foresaw that needs differ greatly from area to area. Enormous care and trouble has therefore gone into creating imaginative partnerships which will design programmes that are relevant to their areas.

That is highly commendable, but there is one slight difficulty: despite the flexibility that has been written into the design of the programme, some of the uncomfortable deadlines that have to be met—particularly in the pathfinder areas—are making it difficult for the most innovative and imaginative programmes to succeed. I should like my right hon. Friend to give that just a little attention. It would be regrettable if the deadlines that had to be achieved made it difficult for innovation and imagination to be shown within the programmes.

The Select Committee report referred to problems with private sector take-up. The global players have been extremely supportive of the programme—once again, the Government deserve congratulations for getting them signed up—but as we know from our own constituencies, the success of the programme will be determined by small and medium-sized enterprise take-up. Once again, much time and effort is now being given to that and there are signs that many opportunities are forthcoming. I know that the Government are already addressing the issue, which is crucial, as is the quality of training that is written into the private sector option.

Training must be relevant to the young person and to the job market. Not only must it provide benefit to the young people, as it did in the past, but it must be relevant to the employer. In the past, much of the training provided by the training system left the private sector dissatisfied, because the training was not directly relevant to the businesses concerned and did not result in any improvement in productivity. I know that my right hon. Friend is giving a great deal of attention to that, too.

There are also concerns about voluntary sector participation in the programme. I am a veteran of such programmes. I remember the report written by one

[Mr. Foster]

Geoffrey Holland in 1977—an imaginative document, which set out some far-sighted ideas. The voluntary sector played a major part in earlier programmes, but it is finding it rather more difficult to respond this time. In my constituency there is some difficulty in finding the funds to create an overarching structure that would allow the voluntary sector to participate. That is absolutely essential, and I know that my right hon. Friend wants that part of the programme to succeed.

Finally, I should like to say something about the new deal for lone parents and disabled people. I have not heard one right hon. or hon. Member dissent from the view that it is absolutely essential to get more lone parents and disabled people back to work. That has to be right for lone parents, for disabled people, for the labour market and for society at large. There is no dissent from that among my right hon. and hon. Friends, and I suspect that there may be no dissent among the Opposition. The legitimate concerns are that it will be extremely difficult to facilitate lone parents and disabled people getting back to work. The barriers are pretty formidable.

For lone parents, of course, the problem is child care. We very much welcome what the Government are doing in the way of child care, but I suspect that much more will have to be done if we are to get large numbers of lone parents back to work. There are transport problems to be faced. Many employers are not exactly family-friendly, so the culture change that is required to get employers to welcome lone parents back to work may take rather a long time. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not underestimate that.

Disabled people also have a wide range of problems and must not be considered as a generality. We must address their individual problems in getting back to work. There is no question but that they want to work. Many people who work for Remploy do so through choice, even though they might be better off on benefit. Many disabled people would prefer to work, but physically cannot cope with a full day's work, so we have to be absolutely certain that it is made easy for disabled people to get back to work.

Let me issue a warning that appeared in the leader of the *Financial Times* yesterday:

"The lesson from both sides of the Atlantic is that real welfare reform is not a cheap option or an exercise in cost-cutting."

In the United States, it was found to be rather expensive to get people back to work. If my right hon. Friends feel that there are huge savings to be gained by pursuing such a policy, they may be mistaken. I genuinely hope that they are not. We are all signed up to it and we want it to succeed. It is good for the nation, it is good for disabled people, it is good for lone parents, it is good for everyone—but it is has to be done sensitively, and I intend to play a full part in ensuring that it succeeds.

10.48 am

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, so I shall confine my remarks to one subject—women with children and whether or not they should be forced into the market place.

Sometimes the United States sets the fashion in such matters. In some states—notably Wisconsin, which the Select Committee has studied—women on benefits with children as young as 12 weeks are forced back to work. If they refuse to work, their benefit is simply removed. I consider that a cruel practice. I believe that there is a possibility—perhaps a danger—that in our wish to get women into work, which is of course very desirable, we shall force or begin to force women with very young children into work. I will address that subject on the basis not of my own views and prejudices but on the basis of the massive social surveys of women with young children carried out in recent years.

Of all families with dependent children, 70 per cent. are headed by a married couple and 8 per cent. by a cohabiting couple. Of the rest, 20 per cent. are lone mothers and 2 per cent. lone fathers. There has been a dramatic growth in lone-parent households, from 8 per cent. of all households with children in 1971 to 16 per cent. in 1986 and 22 per cent. today. Some lone-parent households are created by bereavement, but the majority nowadays are the result of divorce or separation.

The Department of Social Security has conducted a great deal of research into the attitudes of lone parents. "Lone Parent, Work and Benefits", which was published this year, found that, of lone parents who had never lived with "a partner", 38 per cent. said that they had no intention of ever doing so, and 20 per cent. said that they were looking forward to having more children. When all lone parents were asked why they wanted to remain a lone parent during the "current spell", 48 per cent. said that they preferred to live independently and not as part of a couple. The report discovered a great deal, but one thing is clear: some lone parents simply prefer to remain lone parents—they make that choice.

No modern democracy can or should force people to get married, but that does not mean that lone parenthood is an entirely private matter. First, the taxpayer picks up the bill for welfare payments; secondly, the children grow up with one parent instead of two. In most cases, the missing parent is the father. There is ample evidence available to the House and the nation that such children tend to die earlier, have more illness, do less well at school, exist at a lower level of nutrition, comfort and conviviality, suffer more unemployment, be more prone to deviance and crime, and repeat the cycle of unstable parenting from which they suffered.

It is right that Governments should be concerned about spiralling welfare payments, and I understand why this is a major concern of the new Government. Clearly there is such a thing as welfare dependency, and it has grown dramatically in recent years. Every civilised nation finds it the greatest problem with which they are trying to grapple. The tax and benefit system can encourage people to behave more irresponsibly, and undoubtedly, in every nation in the western world, the tax-benefits system has done precisely that over the past 20 years. It can encourage people not to take responsibility for their own lives, and it can make it easier for people to get away with irresponsible and anti-social behaviour.

In the United States, the deadbeat dad phenomenon is well known. Many men father children, but are then for all practical purposes absent by choice from the home. I have no doubt that there are deadbeat mums, too, but in this country the main problem is families without fathers—and families need fathers. The Child Support Agency can make men pay, but there is a danger of politicians reducing the whole problem of lone parentage solely to one of money. Children need a mother and a

father. The Government should be concerned to promote what is best for children—the two-parent family—and they can do that through the tax and benefit and education systems.

I agree with what Cardinal Hume said on Thursday last week when he asked the Government for a review of the tax and benefit system so as to promote marriage. The cardinal said that lone parents need to spend more time with their children, and that the long-term health of society depends on the health of the family, whether it be the family with a lone parent spending as much time as possible with the children, or the two-parent family.

It is of course right for the Government to discourage welfare dependency, but I should also say very strongly that young children, particularly in a lone-parent household, need a substantial time commitment from their parent. The Government should never use the benefit system to force mothers with pre-school children into work. That is unfair and cruel in a modern and compassionate society.

There has been much talk of high-quality child care, but the best child care is provided by the natural parent. Cardinal Hume suggested that the Government's initiative to get single parents back to work could be "false economy". It concerns me that children of a lone parent, having already been deprived of—usually—a father, will be further deprived through their remaining parent being forced into work.

I do not make that point about the child who is already at school. Perhaps we have been too lax in saying to single parents, "Well, so long as your child is under 16 you can stay at home." Perhaps we have gone to the other extreme from what has happened in Wisconsin. My remarks are directed at the plight of the child of pre-school age.

Why should my opinions matter? Most women, however, share such views.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that mothers in Wisconsin asked to go back to work after 12 weeks not as a result of any social policy but because American working women from all classes go back to work very quickly? Therefore, the decision is made not on the grounds of social policy but simply because Americans refuse to treat welfare mothers any differently. They simply treat mothers very badly. We must therefore be careful what conclusions we draw from Wisconsin.

Mr. Leigh: I am pleased that my colleague on the Social Security Committee has made that point. In an American two-parent family, there is at least some element of choice. Many professional American ladies will want to go back to work very quickly, but at least they have some choice because there is a working father in the family. What concerns me about what is going on in Wisconsin, and what I do not want to be replicated in any way here, is that lone parents who have no choice are simply ordered back to work by the state. That is what happened in the Soviet Union, and it is not a civilised way of behaving.

According to the British social attitudes survey, most women—55 per cent.—believe that mothers with pre-school children should stay at home. Nearly a third of women—28 per cent.—say that part-time work is okay. Only 5 per cent. of women advocate full-time work for mothers with pre-school children. Women should choose; if they want to work part time, full time or not at all, let them. I have no opinion on that. All that I am trying to drive home is that they should not be forced to go out to work as a result of the benefit system.

According to some figures from the Office for National Statistics, 17 per cent. of mothers with pre-school children work full time and a further 31 per cent. part time. The majority of mums with pre-school children do not work at all. Of all mothers with children under 16 years old, only 22 per cent. work full time for an average of 41 hours a week, while 37 per cent. work part time for an average of 18 hours a week. We must recognise that children need time with their mothers.

The British social attitudes survey asked mothers who work part time whether they would change the hours that they worked if they could have the child care of their choice. Interestingly, just over two thirds—67 per cent.—said that they would work the same hours. Only 17 per cent. of those mothers said that they would work full time, and 7 per cent. said that they would like to work additional part-time hours. The survey also asked—this is the interesting point—what sort of child care women wanted. Most said that they would prefer it to be provided by relatives or husbands. The study concluded that the views of women on that point were so firm that

"no amount of child care subsidy will make a difference to them."

The survey found that 62 per cent. of working mothers with children under 12 used relatives, including husbands or cohabiting partners, as child carers. Only 15 per cent. used child minders, and 6 per cent. used a nanny. It is worrying that 4 per cent. of mothers with children under 12 said that they did not need child care arrangements because the children "looked after themselves."

The norm in this country, and the evidence that I have quoted from studies, is that most mothers do not want full-time work. The overwhelming majority of mothers—78 per cent.—do not work full time. It is true that 37 per cent. work part time, but the majority of those mothers are at work only when the children are at school or cared for by a relative.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): The Joseph Rowntree study showed that the two major issues that lone parents said would help them get back into work were opportunities to improve their education and skills, and child care. I do not know what world the hon. Gentleman is living in, but certainly in my experience one of the reasons why so many women depend on friends and family to cobble together child care from one day to the next is that we do not have the same provision for child care as the rest of Europe. In Britain, we have places for only a third of children aged three and over: in France, there are places for 95 per cent. of those children, and in Germany and Spain there are places for 70 per cent. of pre-school children. Women have to cobble together child care because it does not exist in this country, but the Labour Government will address that problem.

Mr. Leigh: That is a fair intervention, and if we can improve child care, I shall be the first to welcome that. However, as the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said, it will require massive increases in public spending, because no savings will be made. The American experience is that increasing child-care

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opportunities has increased public spending. If women want to put their children into child care and go out to work, I am happy with that, but most women do not want to be forced into full-time work against their will. That is my only point. I do not criticise the Government or their efforts to improve child care. Nor am I making a party political point. I am simply warning the House about the implications for this country of what is happening in the United States of America.

I am worried that, in solving one massive social problem—welfare dependency, about which we have all worried for years—we may exacerbate the cycle of deprivation experienced by children, who need and want at least one parent, but preferably both, involved with them all or most of the time. After all, children do not choose their parents, and they are not responsible for the actions of their parent or parents.

Melanie Phillips, a well-known left-of-centre journalist—*[Interruption.]* Well, she used to be.

Mr. Wicks: No more.

Mr. Leigh: She is no more, apparently. She has written:

"Of course some mothers want to work and do work full time from when their children are very young. But to expect all lone mothers to do so is either effectively to deny the importance of the maternal caring role, or else to condemn women to a form of servitude in attempting to combine, alone and unsupported, separate roles in conflicting domains".

The breakdown of the traditional family goes to the heart of the issue. Yes, welfare dependency is a bad thing, and why should others pick up the bill for irresponsible behaviour? However, in the midst of all that, we must consider the children. Forcing lone mothers to work full time could have serious effects on their children. Patching up one problem could lead to even worse problems, unless the central issue of the breakdown of the family is addressed.

What should the Government do? First, a strong distinction should be made between lone parents with pre-school children and those whose children are older. There should also be a cap on the number of hours that lone parents are compelled to work under the scheme even when their children are of school age. Secondly, the Government must address the issue of fatherless families. It is not enough to take money from fathers through the CSA and then leave them alone. Fathers should be expected to perform some of the duties of parents even when a couple have separated. Fathers should be strongly encouraged to take more of a role and the court welfare officers must uphold the need for fathers to have access to their children. Thirdly, and most importantly, the Government must support the traditional family. The divorce rate is far too high.

What should the Government do to support the traditional family? From a number of newspaper reports, it appears that some members of the Government believe that something should be done. A major article in the *Financial Times* on 5 December caught my attention. It claimed that Ministers are considering introducing tax incentives for marriage, making divorce more difficult, reforming the CSA to encourage fathers to keep in touch with their families, and educating children about their future responsibilities. If that article is true, I welcome it. When Treasury civil servants appeared before our Select Committee recently, they were unable to tell me anything about the source of that story, but as it appeared in the *Financial Times* it must have come from a well placed ministerial source.

I hope that the Government are, indeed, considering such radical and substantial steps to support the family. I hope that they are fully seized of the vital importance of encouraging both mother and father to take an active interest in their child. I hope also that the Government will reject the cruel practice of forcing women with pre-school children into work against their will.

11.5 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Most of my hon. Friends and I listened in amazement to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) as he tried to redraw the past 18 years of the Tory Government's performance and the past 10 or 11 years of his own performance. If some of the evidence that he offered today had been offered by him and his colleagues instead of the rhetoric that we heard from the Tory party conference and the actions that we saw from the previous Government, we might not be in the current situation. Others will have the chance to reflect on what the hon. Gentleman said and the way in which he used his vote when his party was in government.

I wish to echo my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), because those of us who have experienced 18 years of opposition need to remind Conservative Members—especially new ones, and also our new hon. Friends—of the history of the previous Tory Government. We saw a succession of make-work schemes, few if any of which were completed according to the programme set out by whoever happened to be the Secretary of State for Employment at the time. In my time in the House, we got through a number of Secretaries of State for Employment. Their attitudes were usually driven by the previous Tory conference and the rhetoric heard there against the unemployed and single parents.

During the previous Government's time in office, those of us on what was then the Select Committee on Employment learned from bitter experience of those schemes—and from trips with various Secretaries of State to the United States of America, to assess whether so-called successes in that country could be introduced here—that getting the long-term unemployed back to work is costly. There is no escaping that principle, and empirical evidence for it is contained in all the Committee's reports, which are available in the Library. That is why I am pleased that, early on, the Labour Government identified the means by which we would meet that cost. We said exactly where the money would come from.

Those of us who followed various Secretaries of State round the world looking at experience elsewhere, discovered that, if we were to deal with the long-term unemployed and single parents, child care, after-school care, and in some cases before-school facilities, were essential. That is why I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and his fellow Ministers have said about ensuring that child care, after-school clubs, and even before-school clubs, will be available to support our new deal policy. All the empirical evidence on the record shows us that there is no easy option for anyone.

I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister and to other hon. Members, because I shall have to leave shortly after speaking. I have a constituency matter to attend to in Dundee, which is rather a long way away, so I must leave the House.

Tayside is one of the pathfinder areas for the new deal, so I shall give my right hon. Friend the Minister the benefit of some of our experience there. I join all the other hon. Members who have spoken of the enthusiasm that has been engendered in the Employment Service. It is amazing to see people who started their careers—in some cases long before I became a Member of Parliament—hoping to help people back into work. They then spent 18 years massaging the unemployment figures—or rather, the claimant count figures—to meet the terms of the latest Government scheme with which they had to try to work.

Now we see those people doing the job that they entered the Employment Service to do—getting people into jobs. They have opened their arms and welcomed with enthusiasm the new deal and the possibilities that it offers. I want to place on record my appreciation of the work of Bob Alexander, Alison Blake and the rest of the Tayside Employment Service team who are leading the pathfinder scheme.

Why was Tayside chosen? Why not Glasgow? Tayside is both an urban and a rural area, whereas Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland, containing most of the population. More importantly, before the Tories gerrymandered the boundaries to get rid of the regional councils, Strathclyde region used its spending power to set up structures that helped to offset the worst aspects of the Tory Government's policies. Those structures are still there, and it would not have given us an accurate reflection of what the new deal could achieve if the pathfinder area had been established in Glasgow. That is why we welcomed the pathfinder area in Tayside.

It has been a struggle. From the day and hour that the initiative was announced, we have had to work hard, and many people have had to learn many lessons. We have had to find ways of working together, and new initiatives that we can all support. It has been exciting. I have tried to play my part, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who unfortunately cannot be with us this morning. We have been heartened by the response, especially from employers.

More than 200 employers from all over Tayside have attended the various meetings, and more than 100 have committed themselves to working with the scheme. When my right hon. Friend the Minister visited Dundee recently, he met the representatives of several of the companies, so he will know for himself the enthusiasm with which they have greeted the new deal.

We now have targets to meet, and 36 personal advisers are ready to move in and work with the clients. We knew from the beginning that most of the clients would be disillusioned after 18 years of "revolving door" schemes, which they quickly learned how to operate. We wanted to stop the revolving door and have a one-door approach. People would come in and go out at the end better, more whole people, who we hoped would be able to move into real long-term employment.

Because of that disillusionment, we said early on, "Let's not keep the client forums and focus groups inside the Employment Service." The Employment Service has many connotations of people being pulled in and having their benefit cut, or told that they have to go into a programme that they do not agree with.

We went out and made contact with organisations throughout Tayside that helped people with problems such as drink, drugs, homelessness and debt. We built a structure of information points and organisations already funded for such provision, and we met the clients there. As a result of that, the gateway will be managed in the special needs group by a consortium led by the adult community training organisation, and in mainstream education and careers guidance by Tayside Careers Ltd.

The gateway is ready to start. Last week, all the contracts were handed out for the other areas. In education and training, the lead body will be Scottish Enterprise Tayside, and the chamber of commerce, local authorities and other training providers will also be involved, with local colleges and voluntary organisations.

The voluntary option will be led by the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations, with more than 90 organisations in the voluntary sector participating. We discovered early that if the environmental task force is to work, we must have regard to the way in which Tayside is structured. We have Angus, Perth and Dundee—communities that are significantly different from each other.

We therefore decided to place the environmental task force contracts with the three councils, Dundee city council, Angus council and Perth and Kinross council, to ensure that the differences within Tayside were reflected.

We have also had support from the private sector. I should especially like to place on record our thanks to Travel Dundee, a subsidiary of National Express, which offers free travel to new deal clients attending job interviews and half-price travel for six months for those who are successful in obtaining employment at the end of the programme.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): The hon. Gentleman said that about 100 employers on Tayside had expressed support for the new deal. Have those 100 employers actually offered jobs? Do they believe that the current level of employment will continue for the next year or so, or do they, like many other employers, expect a downturn in the economy, which will mean that they are unable to provide jobs?

Mr. Ross: None of the employers has said, "We've got five jobs," or, "We've got 10 jobs." They have given a commitment to work with the new deal scheme, and they are confident that, when the clients are ready, they will be able to take some on. They have not said, "Here are 10, 15 or 20 jobs." If they did that, I would expect the Employment Service to provide clients off the normal unemployment register to be taken now. The employers have given a commitment. They have signed the contract in the new deal employer agreement, which is much more important.

I do not want to delay the House too long, because I know that other hon. Members seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. ScotRail has offered the same deal as Travel Dundee, and Stagecoach, which operates a service throughout the region, is also to offer subsidised travel for new deal clients. However, we have a problem

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in Angus, because we have not yet managed to convince the local bus operator there to offer the same facility, but we are working on it.

The programme is up and ready to go. We in the Tayside new deal programme set ourselves the deadline that everything had to be in place by 15 December. That has been achieved. On 16 December, my colleagues in Tayside invited all the organisations involved in the programme to attend a walk-through from the identification of the client to the end of the option. That was held in Angus college, and more than 70 people attended. It was a huge success.

Now we are waiting for 15 January, when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will come to Dundee to launch the new deal there. We are up and ready to go. Roll on that day.

11.18 am

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): It is a pleasure to speak in the first debate on the new deal, as the newly appointed Liberal Democrat spokesman on employment and training. As the Government know, my party supports their efforts to get people off welfare and into work. We find it hard to believe that anybody could criticise those efforts.

However, we have a few concerns about the new deal that I should like to raise with the Minister and with the House. The first involves the voluntary sector. I enjoyed the speech by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) in that respect. We also have concerns about the problems that will be faced by rural areas, and about the element of compulsion in the new deal. I shall touch on that later.

In response to a question from me on 28 November, the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), who is responsible for welfare to work, pointed out that the new deal's objective is not to create more jobs; it is principally aimed at raising employability. We all know that some of the most basic and fundamental skills that people need to achieve employment are literacy and numeracy. We welcome the Government's moves so far on early years education and their announcement a few days ago on tackling under-achievement among 16 and 17 year-olds. We are confident that the education and training option under the new deal will also help 18 to 24-year-olds to improve their basic skills.

Our concerns lie with the fact that the final group of young people who will enter the options will be those who are most difficult to help. Recent research by the Royal Statistical Society shows that most young people do not stay unemployed for long. Even before the new deal, 90 per cent. of all young people signing on for jobseeker's allowance found a job after nine to 12 months. With the intensive job search help available within the gateway period, that figure will inevitably rise.

We support that, because it means that those young people will achieve what they want—a job. In that respect, we are confident that the gateway policy will work. However, the people who will go on from that need the most attention because they will be the least employable, the lowest skilled and the least motivated, and they will go on to the new deal options. That must be recognised.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North–East Hertfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although young people are important, the group that needs most help consists of people who are over 40 years old, unskilled and long-term unemployed? Is it not odd to offer wage subsidies to young workers but not to older workers who most need the help? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that exacerbates the problem for older workers, because they must then compete in the job market with younger people who have a wage subsidy? Does not that encourage all the worst trends in the employment market in terms of agism?

Mr. Keetch: I endorse some of what the hon. Gentleman says, but the Government's policy is to target the young unemployed, and this morning we are simply responding to that policy.

I was discussing the four options that the Government propose after the gateway period. The first is the basic skills option, which many young people will take up. The second is the job subsidy option, which the Employment Service expects some 40 per cent. of young people going through the new deal to take up. Those participants are most likely to get jobs, and the participants left to go on to the voluntary sector and the environmental task force sector will be the most difficult to place. We are worried that participants in the new deal will regard the last two options—in the voluntary and the environmental task force sectors—as less attractive.

We have few fears about the ability and will of the voluntary sector to deliver programmes that will produce high quality and value for individuals who take part. The voluntary sector does a real job, and we want the Minister to make sure that the help that the voluntary and the environmental task force sectors receive is designed to ensure that those are real options. Intensive support is needed in that area, and we hope that the Government will provide it.

Some people who take up those options will have genuine problems. Some will have difficulty getting up in the morning, not just because they are bone idle, but because they have little or no experience of the workplace. Some will be apathetic; some will be badly motivated; some will think that working in the voluntary sector is not a real job; and some, because of the compulsion element, will be pretty disruptive. We hope that the Government understand the voluntary sector's concerns and will deal with them.

Concerns have been raised with my colleagues and me about the problems likely to be experienced under the new deal in rural areas. Because of inaccessibility, participants in rural areas might not get as many options as unemployed people in urban areas. Rural areas will need particular attention. I come from Herefordshire, and I know the problems of accessibility and transport. We realise that the Government have set up deals with transport companies and that some partnership deliverers in the new deal have prepared excellent strategies. For example, the new deal partnership in Herefordshire recently received an A grade for its strategy, and I congratulate it on that. However, the Minister must give an assurance that unemployed people in isolated rural

areas will have the same number of high-quality options as those who live in cities. Can he assure the House that participants from those areas will have the opportunity of high-quality training?

The aspect that most concerns Liberal Democrats about the new deal is the compulsion element, which should not be necessary. Recent studies conducted by, for example, the Children's Society show that, even given the poor number of quality schemes available under the previous Government, the vast majority of young people continued to participate in them. With a policy of compulsion, a small minority of those who will need to be forced on to a scheme will simply create a disruptive element, threatening the quality of training available to others. They will be apathetic and begrudging about the whole scheme.

On a broader point, we are concerned that young people will always have in the back of their minds the fact that the person assigned to help them will also have the power to remove their benefits. That will damage the relationship between the adviser and the participant, and limit the potential for trust.

Mr. Gibb: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that, if a young person does not make himself available for work, he should be allowed to continue languishing on income support?

Mr. Keetch: People do not want to languish on income support. As the hon. Gentleman should know, the vast majority of young people want to work. The experience under the previous Government showed that, when 16 and 17-year-olds had their benefit withdrawn, a significant number of those young people simply disappeared from the system. We are concerned that, if sanctions are imposed on 18 to 24-year-olds as well, it could have a similar impact, creating a status-zero group within society. That will do nothing for those individuals or for society as a whole. On a scheme such as the new deal, where individual attention is vital, the compulsion element could damage young people's perception of the programme. Young people will be encouraged to take up the programme if it offers quality, not compulsion.

The Children's Society and other voluntary organisations share our concern on that issue. We recognise that the Government have tried to ensure that young people are offered as many options as possible; if they are to have no choice about whether they participate, they should at least be given a choice about the option that they would like.

Many thousands of young people are on existing Government training schemes, but would rather be in full-time work. The Royal Statistical Society says that 70 per cent. of young people who leave the claimant count to enter existing Government training schemes will sign back on the dole within 12 months, because they cannot get work. That is where the broader aspect comes in.

The new deal is meant to improve employability, but it will not create more jobs. While there are undoubtedly sectors that require additional training, the new deal will not target those high-skill places. Essentially, we are worried about the "revolving door" syndrome, to which the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) referred. Young people may enter the new deal and come out of it at the end with improved employability, but if no jobs are available, they must simply wait around for a new scheme to come along.

We are also concerned about the funding of the new deal. As Labour Members regularly remind us, we did not support the windfall tax. It is a one-off measure, and we are concerned about what will happen after this Parliament in terms of long-term training. Do the Government intend to privatise a few more industries in this Parliament, so that they can introduce more windfall tax in the next and have another new deal?

Before the general election, the Liberal Democrats put forward a series of fully costed proposals that would have dealt with education and training for the length of this Parliament and beyond. We would have invested in people from day one. We would have guaranteed early years education to all three and four-year-olds, which would have helped thousands of lone parents, as well as being an investment in our country's future. We would have shifted the tax burden from jobs to pollution. We would have introduced a new low-income benefit and a remissible training levy.

We have many other policies, for example, on how we would have introduced training, which I am more than happy to discuss at length if hon. Members want—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."]—but I do not want to detain the House. However, Liberal Democrat Members welcome the new deal as a valuable approach intended to deal with a problem that the previous Government neglected. We shall support it and encourage it as much as we can.

11.30 am

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) on his first speech in his new post. Most of the hon. Gentleman's comments were perceptive, and in this debate and beyond he will see how the Government are dealing with his points. However, his final comments rather spoilt what had been a good speech.

I shall refer to a number of ways in which the Labour Government are already tackling continuing employment. I hope that, given those comments and others that will be made in the debate, the Liberal Democrats will give their genuine and full backing to the welfare-to-work programme, and resist the temptation to snipe at the inevitable practical difficulties.

I welcome the welfare-to-work programme. It has special importance to my constituency; Liverpool, Riverside has the second highest unemployment rate in the country—17.8 per cent.—and a male unemployment rate of 24.2 per cent. That is nearly 6,500 people—and nearly 2,000 of them are aged between 18 and 24. Welfare to work needs to have a special impact in Liverpool, Riverside, where unemployment is a deep-seated and long-term problem.

In that context, I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for his decision to designate Liverpool as one of the country's five employment zones. He recognises the special position not merely of unemployed people in general in Liverpool, but of older unemployed people. I also thank my right hon. Friend for coming to Liverpool to announce the employment zone policy, and for the subsequent decision to designate the city in that way.

I support the welfare-to-work programme because it is a decisive and well thought out attempt to intervene in the cycle of unemployment at the individual and community level to give people individual attention, opportunities for

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work and the acquisition of skills to enable them to obtain and retain work and to ensure that people who missed out on basic educational qualifications get a second chance.

The very fact that the Government are prepared to do that and that they are working out in great detail the practical way in which to do it, to assist the individual and the community, is very important. Equally, it is important that that attempt to deal with individual needs—employability and the acquisition of skills and basic educational qualifications—is carried out in the context of a Government who are already changing priorities to ensure that public and private sector money is spent to generate employment in the economy in general and to create more opportunities.

The redistribution of more than £5 billion from the excess profits of the privatised utilities into employment-generating projects in health, education and training and directly into employment is a significant part of the Government's policy. Liverpool will benefit by £9 million from the programme to release capital receipts. That is £9 million of employment-generating activity that will also meet social need. From the additional £2.3 billion funding for schools, Liverpool already knows that it will benefit by around £11 million—£11 million of employment-generating, construction-based activity that will again assist social and educational needs, but will also provide employment.

More generally, the Government are about to put before the House a proposal to set up regional development agencies, which will bring together the public and private sectors, led by the business sector. That will lead to more employment and more regeneration of local economies, such as that of Liverpool and the north-west, and create and develop long-term employment.

I welcome the welfare-to-work programme, with its attention to detail and to individuals and its designation of individual employment opportunities, but I see its real value as leading from individual attention and opportunity to employment-generating activities in the economy as a whole and in the regional economy in particular. As we help individuals, we will be creating more opportunities for long-term employment.

The welfare-to-work programme is working across a broad range. It is working with private employers and with the voluntary and public sectors. In Liverpool, it is already working with locally based community organisations, which are already generating employment-training opportunities, such as the work being done in Vauxhall, the work of the Eldonians, the work being done in Dingle by Dingle Opportunities, the innovative Brunswick furniture resource centre and the Granby-Toxteth development trust. Those projects are already creating employment through socially beneficial work.

I am pleased to note that, in addition to working with private employers, the welfare-to-work programme will work with community organisations to extend opportunities for employment and contribute to the social well-being of local communities.

It is a long time since a Government took such a brave initiative. Any initiative that tackles long-term problems encounters snags. It is inevitable that, if expectations are raised, the problems will not merely be mentioned, but highlighted. However, the Government are determined to tackle unemployment.

The last Government to tackle unemployment in this way was the previous Labour Government and some of my first involvement in developing employment opportunities was through working with the Manpower Services Commission on the original job-creation programme under that Government. I saw some excellent work, some of which led to long-term employment and met social and community need as well as employing people and giving them skills.

Regrettably, soon after the Conservative Government won the 1979 general election, the Manpower Services Commission was dismantled, and all that excellent work was cut asunder and destroyed. I am sorry that 18 dark, long years followed, during which the unemployment figures that we thought unacceptable in the 1970s grew higher and higher and became simply a fact of life.

This Government do not accept that unemployment on that scale is a fact of life. That is why we are instituting the welfare-to-work programme. I am convinced that a programme that considers individual and local needs against a background of employment-generating initiatives, redistribution and the regeneration of the regional and national economies is the way forward.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his work on welfare to work. It will benefit this country and my constituents.

11.39 am

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I crave the indulgence of the House, because I know that I cannot make a maiden speech twice, but I hope that I may follow the usual courtesies and thank my predecessors for all the work that they have done. I come from a tradition of Members of Parliament who are very involved in the constituency of Beckenham: Sir Philip Goodhart was its Member of Parliament for 35 years and he and Piers Merchant, whom I succeed, had a strong reputation for supporting their constituents. I plan to continue that tradition.

Crystal Palace park is in Beckenham, although it is on the borders of many other London areas. Those who have visited the park will know that it is most beautiful, but sadly in need of regeneration. An application is being prepared under the new deal for intermediate labour market work to restore the park to its former glory. I look forward to the benefits from that.

Under the previous Government's single regeneration budget, Crystal Palace, Penge and Anerley have some very imaginative proposals, one of which is to create new construction jobs through training. That is producing precisely the same effect that any new deal proposal would. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) that there are many effective ways of ensuring that the young and long-term unemployed get back into the labour market.

We must ensure, as the money is available, that it is used. The Crystal Palace project is working along those lines. I should like to make my next point to the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), who has probably left to go to his constituency; as a very new Member of

Parliament, I will also have to go to my constituency, so I hope that I have the leave of the House to go soon after I have spoken.

Mr. Keetch: It is not far.

Mrs. Lait: That is right: as it is not far, I can carry out more engagements than, perhaps, the hon. Member for Dundee, West, who may take some time to get up to Tayside.

It is important to concentrate on ensuring that the young and the long-term unemployed get into the labour market, but we must also ensure that the economy can expand to accommodate those jobs and those people. It is of some concern to me that, although unemployment is decreasing, thanks to the policies of the previous Conservative Government, we are facing circumstances in which there could be a downturn in the economy.

In my view, the pound will remain strong, and that has a disincentive effect on some export industries; we are beginning to see the effects of higher interest rates; and the effect of windfall income on domestic spending is coming to an end. Those three factors, taken together, are being taken account of by the retail sector, which is already preparing for a downturn that it foresees happening next summer.

After the Christmas spending rush, we will probably find that spending is down for this year: there is already anecdotal evidence that less is being spent on leisure and in shops because people's incomes are being restrained. That will have a knock-on effect on businesses, which in the long run or—dare I say it?—even in the shorter run may not expand and take on people who want to join the labour market.

The Government would be better advised to consider the areas in which employment is weak. The speed with which many young people get back into employment has already been mentioned. We should consider those geographical areas in which people find it especially difficult to get back into employment because there is a weak local economy.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) mentioned the problems in Liverpool, with its extremely weak local economy; other areas, despite an effective regional development policy in previous years, remain weak. Coastal areas tend to have higher unemployment than inland areas, largely because communications and infrastructure are poor there. The Government might consider recasting their regional development policy to ensure that the weaker elements in the United Kingdom are encouraged and brought up to the level of employment opportunities throughout the rest of the country.

Although the Minister refers to the enthusiasm with which separate companies—many of them blue chip companies—have greeted the new deal, it appears from the briefing of the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry, which have surveyed their membership, that, while employers are happy to take the subsidies on offer, the broad membership of those organisations has no enthusiasm for the new deal and indeed has some concerns about it.

Some of those concerns were outlined by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch): problems of market distortion, with companies making the wrong decisions merely because subsidies are available; deadweight; disruption; and—I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman did not mention this—red tape. There is an enormous fear that a huge amount of bureaucracy may be created. We also need to ensure that the recruits are willing to work and have an aptitude for the employment on offer.

The new deal criteria require an employer to keep on a trainee who displays the necessary aptitude. Is it the employer who decides what the necessary aptitude is?

Mr. Andrew Smith: Of course.

Mrs. Lait: I am most grateful for that intervention. How is aptitude defined? Is it the ability to do a job, or is it the necessary discipline on the part of the employee? Will an employer make the same decision as if the trainee had come in through a direct application and not through the programme? Will an employer be able to employ someone on the criteria that they would normally expect to apply? People have expressed concern about that. I take it from the Minister's nodding that he agrees that those are the criteria. I thank him for that.

How will the minimum wage affect the longer-term unemployed over 25? As I understand it, employees must receive in wages at least as much as the employer's subsidy. If so, how does that interact with whatever level the minimum wage is set at? Will an employer have to pay the minimum wage to people he takes on under the new deal, despite the subsidy? It would be useful to have an assurance on that.

Like many others, I want the long-term unemployed and young people who are unemployed to be in work, but I have considerable doubts about whether this new deal will, in the long run, keep the labour market free of distortion and allow companies to make their decisions free from the influence of subsidy. We must never revert to what happened in 1979. It was not beneficial to the British economy to have companies with over-employment, retaining workers for all the wrong reasons. We need companies with productive workers who can help to keep those companies in business.

11.50 am

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), who was making, if not a maiden speech, then a kind of comeback speech. I congratulate her on it. I spent some days in Beckenham before the by-election trying to persuade her electors to give the hon. Lady a rather different route from welfare to work—we nearly succeeded—but she has ended up here, and my congratulations are genuine.

The hon. Lady's constituency boasts the original site of the crystal palace—the dome of its day. My constituency—here comes the link—boasts one of the finest football clubs in the world, Crystal Palace football club.

We are here some 50 years after the post-war compact devised by Keynes and Beveridge. The latter was a great Liberal, although not great enough to make 1p on income tax stretch as far as today's Liberals can make it stretch—perhaps because he knew some arithmetic. Beveridge, Keynes and the post-war Labour Government tried to refashion the relationship between the economic and the social in a welfare state of considerable sophistication but

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always based on the assumption of full employment. We, in the years and months to come, need to look again at the relationship between the worlds of work and of social policy, in different and rather more difficult circumstances than those facing the post-war reformers.

Our inheritance is one of unemployment and economic recession. Many hon. Members have today rightly focused on the young and on the long-term unemployed, who are often men in their late forties and fifties. We need to focus rather more on that group than we sometimes have done.

Owing to family insecurities, more and more children are being brought up in one-parent families. Typically, the head of the household is a lone mother who is not in employment. This new challenge raises difficulties to do with values. We are attempting to grapple with such problems and with disability issues and with the problems facing people with severe learning difficulties who are seeking access to the labour market.

Not surprisingly, we are not alone in having to tackle these problems. Australia, New Zealand, the United States and many other western welfare democracies are grappling with them too. The Labour Government in Australia produced a welfare-to-work strategy in the document "Working Nation" some years ago. I have seen it in operation in New Zealand as well, and more recently—with parliamentary colleagues—in Wisconsin.

The changes are called for because of changes in the economic, social and demographic fabric of society. We are having to think through the future of our welfare states. It may be relatively easy to apply the strategy to some groups among the young unemployed, although many of them have known too many schemes and have become disillusioned, but there is a minority on the margins of crime and drug misuse to whom it will be much more difficult to apply it. The Australian experience shows that it is sometimes necessary to adopt a one-to-one case work approach to get some of these people back into work. It is neither easy nor cheap; but it is worth doing for social as well as economic reasons.

The number of one-parent families has been increasing steadily in societies such as ours—these trends are international. As many as 60 per cent. of this group find themselves part of it because of separation or divorce, but the most rapidly growing group are the families headed by what demographers describe as single never married mothers—they constitute one third of the group.

Such families tend to be the most insecure; the father is less likely to be a player than in some other one-parent families. Between 70 and 85 per cent. of them depend on income support for all or most of their income. It is quite right that the Government should focus on this group, among others, when drawing up their welfare-to-work strategy. There must be a change of culture in social security and employment offices. It is no longer good enough to say that until the youngest child is 16 the mother's need will be assessed; meanwhile she is simply handed a giro and not required to work or even to be seen again. We need a more positive approach to enable this group to find work and child care and to build up the confidence necessary to do so. That is why I believe the Government's overall strategy to be right.

No decent strategy of welfare to work, however, must be based on blind dogma of the sort that suggests that every lone mother, whatever the needs or age of her child, has to be in employment, and that, if she is not, she is somehow a failure. We need to blend into the strategy a family perspective which focuses increasingly on the most important group of all: the children.

We must not dodge these issues. At the moment, we say that, until the youngest child in a one-parent family is 16, there is no requirement to work. That is patently absurd. I have not checked the history books, but I guess that the notion dates back to the 1940s, when most mothers stayed at home looking after their children. Those days, thank God, have gone, for all sorts of reasons. Women now work outside the home just as men do, to pay the mortgage, the rent and so on. For the sake of equity, we need to re-examine the respective positions of one and two-parent families.

If anything, we need to talk more about two-parent families in some of these debates. At some stage, we should grasp the nettle and abandon the rule that says that a lone mother must stay at home until her youngest child is 16. That is daft, and, gives the wrong signals. I have seen the desperate effects on lone mothers who, when their youngest child does reach 16, suddenly find, 25 years after they were last in the labour market, that they are required to work, which terrifies them—and I can understand why. It is a silly rule. At some stage—I am not urging the Government to do it immediately; let us try the voluntary strategy—we should grasp the nettle.

Similarly—this is the quid pro quo in terms of the social politics; I agree with the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) on this one—we must not be over-harsh. The judgment about how to care for a young child up to the age of five, say—I am not sure whether it is five, six, seven or eight, but it is certainly the judgment about how to care for a baby—is best left to the family. Mother does know best, and it is not right for any Government to say otherwise.

We saw the horror story in Wisconsin. Some good things are being done there in terms of child care, but saying to a mother, "When your child is 12 weeks old you will be required to work, and your benefit can be cut if you do not," has more to do with child cruelty than child policy. I see a Conservative Member shaking his head.

Mr. Leigh: I am nodding. It is all right.

Mr. Wicks: No, another one—the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb). The splits remain, even on this issue.

There is a serious point here. The income support regime for lone mothers should be liberal and generous for those with children under the age of five. The benefits should be as generous as possible. I am saying not that mothers with children under five should not be in employment—many are—but that the mother, not Parliament or Government, should make the choice. That has to be the basis of sound social policy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) mentioned disability issues. I want to talk more about people with learning difficulties. In my home borough of Croydon yesterday, a charity called Status Employment showed me its work with young people with severe learning difficulties—people whom the social security system categorises as not capable of working; and it has the benefit structure to match. I met one young woman, now 32, who has Down's syndrome. After she

finished school, she spent nine years of her life going to a day centre—the cost of which, incidentally, was about £54,000. She wanted a job; she knew that others had jobs.

Status Employment, an excellent agency—I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister might be able to visit it sometime—said that it would help the young woman to find a job. Its strategy is to go into the place of employment—in her case, a hotel—and, for a week or so, do the job itself. Afterwards, the young woman went in and, for a week or two, did the job with the hotel management until she had been properly trained.

The young woman has been doing that job for about four years now. She is one of the hotel's most valued employees, and has had an award from it for her service. The only problem is the social security regime: the regulations—I understand the complexities here and am sympathetic to the problems—say that she cannot work for more than 16 hours. If she does, she comes off income support and some other benefits. Given that she lives in a residential home that costs £400 a week, hon. Members will realise the difficulties.

I urge the Minister to say something in his winding-up speech about the needs of people with disabilities or, in that young woman's case, learning difficulties. There is good practice out there and we need to work away at the social security traps so that more people such as that woman can find the work that they want and deserve to have. I know that the Minister is sympathetic to the issue, but I urge him to say something about it.

The welfare-to-work strategy is the right strategy. We must not confuse it with a work ethic triumphalism that says that the only decent work is in the waged economy, as opposed to caring for very young children at home. We need to blend the strategy with a perspective about family policy. As I have said, as well as the obvious groups to be concerned about, we should also be concerned about those with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, many of whom are out of the job market and, as my experience showed yesterday, dearly want what we all have—a job.

12.3 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): This is undoubtedly an important debate. I am sorry to see so few hon. Members on both sides the House, but particularly perhaps on the Government Benches, as this is clearly a centrepiece of their programme.

Mr. Kirkwood: How many Friday attendances has the hon. Gentleman seen?

Mr. Woodward: This is a centrepiece of the new Government's programme. To see barely 20 hon. Members on the Government Benches to discuss a centrepiece programme is relevant.

Mr. Wicks: It is the secret seven on the other side.

Mr. Woodward: We are also the effective seven.

When I was in America a few years ago, I was incredibly impressed by the teaching of Professor Galbraith. I share with the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) and others the view that unemployment is an evil in our society.

Unemployment is a terrible thing. It has happened in my family; my brothers have both recently experienced long periods of unemployment, and I know the devastating effect that it can have on individuals and their families. Nobody on either side of the House would question for one moment the importance of measures that need to be taken to alleviate the effects of unemployment. The questions are what those measures should be and whether they are relevant.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North rightly raised the question of the very different world in which we operate today from that of William Beveridge—and indeed, thinking about the idea of the new deal and welfare to work, the world of Roosevelt back in the 1930s. Listening to some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), one might think that that has not been recognised. Unemployment in this country undoubtedly rose in the earlier part of the 1990s, but the hon. Lady seems to have failed to notice that it also rose in a number of other countries as well.

The only difference seems to be that, unlike the situation in other major European nations, unemployment has fallen considerably in the United Kingdom in the past few years under the Conservative Government. It has not fallen in the same way in France or Germany. It may be worth Labour Members showing a little humility and recognising that there was a Government before the one elected on 1 May, and that that previous Government presided over a dramatic fall in unemployment.

There is no disagreement over the fundamental objective of the new deal, which is to do something about taking people off the unemployment register and getting them into jobs. The question is whether the measures are appropriate. There is a danger that, in the rhetorical flurry of the new Government, some realistic measures of objectivity may be lost. Since the new deal was dreamed up by the Labour party, more than half the members of its specific target group are now in employment. That did not require a new deal or a welfare to work programme; it simply required real jobs.

One need not necessarily pay credit to a Conservative Government or an incoming Labour Government, but one should pay credit to the companies that have created the jobs that the young people now have. We spend a great deal of time criticising each other on both sides of the House and flattering each other as colleagues about what we are doing, what we intend to do and what we did not do, but the truth is that the jobs have been created by British firms for young, and older, British people. Those firms deserve the credit. When Labour Members heavily criticise the Conservative Government—I obviously disagree with their comments—they must bear it in mind that they are effectively criticising the firms that created the jobs. Those firms should be praised for that. They are the firms with whom the Government are seeking a partnership in the prosecution of their new deal.

There are two crucial questions to be asked. First, what will the measures of the new deal do for the specific target group of 18 to 24-year-olds? The current number is 122,000—by the time that the national scheme is up and running, it will probably be fewer than 100,000. What will the new deal do to get those people into jobs that will be sustained when the period of subsidy ends? The second critical question is what the new deal will do for the other

[Mr. Woodward]

people who occupy the registers of the long-term unemployed. What will it do to enhance their employment prospects?

The new deal is not so new. The only thing that is really new about it is the new tax that it raised this summer—the £3.5 billion to £5 billion of funds to be used to pay for it. Like many others, at school I was taught to cite my sources. The new deal stems principally from the work being done in Australia and America. I suspect that Robert Reich deserves a little more credit in Government documents than he currently receives.

America has had an extraordinary period of economic prosperity, with 12 million new jobs created since 1993. In their period of welfare to work and in their new deal, however, the poor in America have barely benefited from the tremendous economic benefits.

California is often cited as a model for welfare to work programmes, and I am sure that hon. Members have learnt from many of the mistakes that have been made there. Nevertheless, it is important to prick the bubble and to remind ourselves of the reality—that California's welfare-to-work scheme has not been a great success. Recent evaluations by California's Public Policy Institute show that, in the next five years, measured poverty in California will rise from 27 per cent. to 42 per cent. Recent surveys examining the GAIN—the greater awareness to independence—programme show that, after three years, only one in four of those who participated in the programme are still in employment.

California's programme has not been a huge success and has had huge problems. I very much hope that the Minister, as part of his consultation, will want to take on board what went wrong there. Undoubtedly the programme's aims were right, but it has not worked. We have to understand a little more about why it has not worked.

Ms Stuart: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the United States is an extremely large country, that it is generally accepted that both California and New York are quite exceptional in their conditions, and that to draw general conclusions would therefore be somewhat disingenuous?

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Lady is right. The danger is always that, in examining models around the world, everyone will get caught up in the flurries of excitement about a model somewhere that is thought to work. Many people wanted to study the California model. I am saying that we should examine also how that scheme has evolved, and beware of extracting its first half without examining its second half.

The worry is that current studies evaluating the California programme are revealing that it is not the success that it was originally thought to be, and that, after originally taking many people off welfare, it is creating a situation in which many people need welfare but in which the programmes have been removed. The programmes are not there when people need them.

There is undoubtedly a need to match the new deal welfare to work programme with the Government's welfare reform programme. All hon. Members should heed the type of comments made by the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party—who I hope will not be shown any yellow cards, called into Downing street, or even removed, like Oasis and other bands, from Downing street party lists. He made a valid point: serious welfare reform is crucial.

To answer the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), the lesson from California must be that we should beware an early flurry of excitement which allows us to dismantle measures that may protect people. Lone parents, the disabled and others whom the Government may wish to have off unemployment registers will need welfare support if those programmes go wrong, but by that time the support may not be there.

We have been so carried away by the rhetorical flush of everything being new—the new economy, the new deal, the new responsibilities and the new everything else: Labour Members have learnt the rhetoric well—that real debate and analysis has been stopped. Education and training, for example, are now always said in the same breath. But they are different issues. There is, unquestionably, a public responsibility for education, because the state can and should provide good education. But is the state the best provider of training?

I heard the Minister talk about partnership. Of course there should be partnership, but a great deal of the evidence to date suggests that public sector training does not endure. It perhaps offers a short-term panacea to get people off the unemployment register, but at the end of the day one has to ask whether the training that the public sector provides is the best kind of training.

The report produced by the Select Committee on Education and Employment is tremendously interesting. That is especially so of the evidence that it contains. Having read the comments of Peter Davis at the beginning, I found it worrying that there have been fewer representations from business than the Minister might have liked. I am sure that he will do all he can to change that. As hon. Members have said, it is worrying that there have not been enough representations from the small and medium-sized enterprises which will be absolutely vital if the Government's objectives are to be met.

Is this programme the right measure at this time? David Webster, the chief housing officer of Glasgow city council, has produced an excellent study. He went behind the rhetoric and examined many of the assumptions made about the link between unemployment and the long-term unemployed. For the benefit of the House, I shall refer to one or two of his conclusions. He points out that there is a very interesting pattern and a close correlation between rising levels of unemployment and increasing numbers of long-term unemployed. As unemployment falls, so does the number of long-term unemployed, although the fall in the latter lags behind a little.

The survey covers the period from 1948 until the present day. It includes research that shows that, while there are regional variations, the situation is pretty much identical across the country. It also shows that, if the long-term unemployed are to be helped, unemployment itself has to be tackled and real jobs have to be created.

There is no question but that welfare to work is a good objective, but is it the right use of £3.5 billion of public money? Is there a danger that it is a short-term measure to deal with a long-term problem? Of course we need to tackle joblessness, but perhaps there is a case for more specific targeting of the money in areas such as

Manchester, Glasgow and Liverpool which have particular problems that have resulted from a changing job market. That changing job market has stemmed not from the policies of a Conservative Government but from changes in the global environment and the demand for work. Are the measures of the new deal the correct ones to tackle such problems?

Will the new deal promote greater equality, one of the other objectives mentioned by the Government in the Select Committee's excellent report? There is undoubtedly a huge discrepancy between those who are well off and those who are not in employment, but will the new deal redress that? I think probably not.

In his evidence to the Select Committee, Peter Robinson said:

"I think the equity case for wanting to rebalance priorities within the overall New Deal is quite strong in that clearly the older very long-term unemployed have more difficulties in getting back into regular employment when compared with the youth group, particularly the group unemployed for between six and 12 months or six and 18 months. So, yes, I think we should be thinking about that rebalancing. It also perhaps offers an opportunity to rebalance the objectives towards other groups who are not registered unemployed: the disabled, lone parents. That is a feature of the New Deal but perhaps it is a feature that ought to be elevated to greater prominence."

That is a very important point. Labour Members are genuinely concerned about the plight of lone parents and the disabled, because they are worried that many of the pledges that they made and endorsed behind their leader are subject to considerable questions. It is clear from *The Daily Telegraph* this morning that yesterday's meeting with the Secretary of State for Social Security was not a happy one. The disabled lobby could not get satisfactory answers. Only last week, there was a rebellion over lone parent benefits. Though that was a one-night wonder, it raised important questions. I find it startling for a Labour Government in their first six months in office to be seen to be deaf to the demands of lone parents and the disabled.

Will the new deal save money? The unemployment costs on the benefit register are a fraction of the amount spent on the disabled—7 per cent. against 20 per cent. It is argued that the measures will go on to help in health and education, but I suspect that no money will be saved. The subsidies for the young people will eventually end and they will be unemployed again. They will then be back on the register and requiring welfare.

The debate is not about kindness—hon. Members on both sides want people to be in work—but about whether the new deal measures will do more harm than good. My fear is that we are embarking on an exercise in great rhetorical flurry that will not do much for the long-term prospects of the unemployed or improve the situation in the job market.

12.21 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I welcome this debate and the Government's strong commitment to the new deal. It holds out hope in Rotherham and the Dearne of new benefits for young and long-term unemployed people, benefits for local firms and benefits for the local economy.

We are used to thinking about the new deal as an employment programme, but we should also think of it as part of a wider economic development programme. If we get it right, it should increase the capacity and activity in local firms, increase the pool of local employable labour and boost regeneration efforts in Rotherham and the Dearne.

The new deal programme could have been written with Rotherham in mind. We have more than 2,000 adults who have been unemployed for more than two years and 1,081 18 to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for more than six months. Of the young people eligible for the new deal, nearly half have never worked. Some 47 per cent. have no educational qualifications and a further one in four have only basic qualifications up to GCSE or NVQ level 1. We have an employment problem and an employability problem—the twin targets of the new deal programme.

I am glad to see the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) back in his place. He has been absent for most of the debate. People in South Yorkshire do not think as highly as he does of the previous Government's employment record. In a decade, we lost 50,000 coal and steel jobs in the county. The people of South Yorkshire would not recognise his self-congratulatory description of the previous Government's record on jobs.

I am proud to say that Rotherham was picked as one of the Government's 12 national pathfinder areas for the new deal. We are well placed to pull together the partnerships and programmes required to deliver it. Agencies in Rotherham have a long track record of working in partnership. Indeed, we have a long track record of delivering something very close to the new deal. I am referring to the direct recruitment programme which was started in 1993; the Select Committee took both written and oral evidence on this. The programme was developed under the current manager, Jane Wheelhouse, and it is run under the wing of Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, with the active collaboration of the Employment Service, Rotherham council and voluntary agencies in the area.

Direct recruitment offers help with advertising vacancies, CV sifting and shortlisting of potential interviewees, a training period of up to 16 weeks, negotiable funding for off-the-job training during the 16-week period, a training grant for continuing development after that period and, from last year, a wage subsidy for six months after that training period.

I dwell on this example because the results of the programme point to the potential of the new deal. The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) urged us to get behind the rhetoric and to offer objective measures. The large majority who have gone through the Rotherham direct recruitment programme have been long-term unemployed. Since the programme started, 1,500 people have been placed in work; that is 75 per cent. of the total in contact with the service.

In the 12 months of the wage subsidy element, 289 people have been put into work. Of that total, 86 per cent. were still in those jobs at the end of the six-month subsidy period and, crucially, 69 per cent. were still in the same jobs six months after the subsidy finished.

Mr. Dorrell: That was under a Tory policy.

Mr. Healey: The programme was a local initiative and was locally developed with great imagination and innovation. It was not helped by the constraints people were working under at that time.

[Mr. Healey]

We have seven working days, including Christmas eve, until we launch the pathfinder area on 5 January. I pay tribute to the part that Rotherham borough council, the Rotherham Employment Service, the Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, voluntary agencies and local employers have played in sinking their organisational self-interests in the common interest of making the new deal programme a success.

With regard to our plans for the local area, four innovative features of what we shall deliver in Rotherham and part of the Dearne area on 5 January are worth noting. First, we are setting up a new deal company which will contract for the overall provision, independently of the new deal programme suppliers. Secondly, we are creating independent, stand-alone, shop-front user access to the new deal company. Thirdly, we have appointed independent consultants to give an authoritative external view of every tender submitted for the new deal programme. They are assessing a quality threshold that all potential contractors will have to meet.

Fourthly, we shall deliver employment status and a wage to all those on the voluntary sector option and the environmental task force in our area which are either directly run or sponsored by Rotherham borough council. Everyone in Rotherham is pleased that we are to be a pilot for the programme. I am certain that other areas will be able to learn from what we do, and that they will also learn from our mistakes.

In relation to the national level, I will focus first on the inquiry by the Select Committee on Education and Employment into the new deal. It was our first inquiry, and we looked in particular at the new deal for young people. This is the most fully developed and heavily funded part of the new deal programme. We examined it particularly in the light of falling rates of unemployment among that target group and because there was common criticism that perhaps the Government should concentrate on other client groups instead. However, the Committee backed the need to tackle first and foremost unemployment among young people because it is such a waste.

When a generation looks forward to a life on welfare, it is a waste of human potential and taxpayers' money. If we can intervene early to establish new work options, skills and habits, we should do so. Otherwise, we shall end up with a generation of young people who do not do jobs, but do cars, their neighbours' houses and drugs instead. There are strong labour-market arguments for targeting that group first, but there are equally strong social reasons for doing so.

The hallmarks of the design phase of the new deal have been genuine openness and flexibility. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on that. However, I caution him that openness and flexibility must also be the hallmarks of the delivery phase. If the new deal is fixed and inflexible and is not open to continuous improvement, and if the Ministers and agencies involved are unable to review and rework the programme as it proceeds, this will become just another scheme whose great potential is strangled. I am committed absolutely to making the programme work in my area and across the country.

Finally, let me set out five aspects of the programme with potential for early review. First, let us extend the modest funds for voluntary sector capacity building beyond the end of March next year. When the voluntary sector sets out to develop something new, it does so slowly and scrupulously. If, in the next financial year, no funds are provided to help the voluntary sector in that respect, it will be a great waste of potential.

Secondly, let us ensure that the chance to tender for the gateway, the voluntary sector option and the environmental task force is more than a one-off opportunity. If we do not, we risk losing innovation and the ability to respond to new needs as they emerge.

Thirdly, let us review the per capita price for provision in the gateway. The costs and the budget were calculated at an earlier stage in the economic cycle, when the planned flow through the gateway was significantly greater. As a greater proportion of those entering the gateway are likely to require support for the full 16 weeks, the costs and complexity of needs are likely to be greater.

Fourthly, let us make a management fee available for other agencies than the Employment Service to help deliver the job option of the new deal. Other agencies, such as training and enterprise councils, chambers of commerce and local employers associations already have established contacts and membership among local employers. At present, they are being asked to get involved in this part of the new deal on the basis of good will and new deal managers have no freedom to fund the contribution that they can make.

Fifthly, let us consider in the short term introducing a gateway element for the new deal for the older, long-term unemployed, and in the long term let us also consider establishing a continuing careers service to advise and support people throughout their working lives. Hundreds of thousands of unemployed and economically inactive people—mainly men—have a wealth of workplace experience and work habits behind them. Re-skilling may be the issue for many, but for some it is more a matter of personal adjustment and considering new options. Pamela Meadows, director of the Policy Studies Institute, appeared before the Select Committee earlier in the week. She put the case as one of needing to help a former steel worker see a future as a traffic warden rather than one on welfare payments.

Everyone involved in the new deal has been working flat out with 5 January or 1 April in mind. I am confident that we will get off to a good start on those dates. Under the immediate pressures of delivery, however, we must not lose the vision of what the new deal programme could become. It is an opportunity that we and the long-term unemployed will not have again.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It arises from early-day motion 128, which called for a public inquiry into Westminster city council. It was tabled in the names of myself, my hon. Friends the Members for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley)—all three of us are former Westminster city councillors—and a number of other Members on 17 June. On 27 June, by which time the motion had been signed by 108 hon. Members, it was suspended on sub judice grounds, pending the outcome of the appeal by Dame Shirley Porter and others against the finding of the district auditor that she been guilty of wilful misconduct.

The early-day motion asked the House unreservedly to condemn the Conservative party under Dame Shirley Porter and her leadership in relation to

"the sale of the cemeteries for 15p, the placing of homeless families in asbestos-ridden towerblocks, and the 'homes for votes' gerrymandering of local elections"

and to condemn

"the failure of successive Conservative governments to take action against Westminster Council or condemn its wrongdoings".

I have just returned this minute from the High Court, where the case was determined. For that reason, the rules of sub judice can no longer apply. I therefore ask that the early-day motion be reinstated at the earliest possible opportunity. So far, not one Conservative Member has appended their name to it.

The High Court found that Dame Shirley Porter and Councillor Weeks lied to the court and to the district auditor and that their ulterior purpose was to alter the electorate in Westminster to affect the outcome of the 1990 city elections by gerrymandering through the sale of council homes. The appeal by Dame Shirley Porter and Councillor Weeks was dismissed and the High Court is today issuing a certificate against Dame Shirley Porter and Councillor Weeks which states that their wilful misconduct jointly and severally caused a loss to the council of £27,023,376. A certificate is today being issued to Westminster council to recover that money—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I have got the general drift of the hon. Member's point of order, and I must tell him that it is not a matter for the Chair.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate to ask for a Government statement today on the verdict in the High Court that we have just heard, which confirms the massive wrongdoing by two former leaders of Westminster city council who were engaged in gerrymandering in Westminster throughout the late 1980s?

Will such a statement address the fact that Westminster council tax payers are £27 million worse off as a consequence and that the absolute priority must be the recovery of that £27 million for the well-being of the citizens of Westminster? One of those found guilty by the court today is still a councillor. The Conservative party has never condemned the behaviour of Westminster city councillors and must now do so on the grounds—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Member has added a great deal to the original point of order. I have no knowledge of the events that have been raised, but I am sure that the Table Office and other appropriate offices in the House of Commons will ensure that the court's findings are examined and, if need be, set the usual wheels in motion.

12.38 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Before those two points of order, which raised important and controversial issues, I was about to say that the debate had been proceeding in a positive, non-partisan and ecumenical fashion. We have had an interesting and valuable debate on a subject of extreme importance to all our constituents and to the Government as a matter of public policy.

Friday debates are usually better than those that we have during the rest of the week, because hon. Members actually listen to one another on a Friday and the debates are the better for it. I listened with interest to the speeches by the hon. Members for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) and for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). The House benefited from their direct experience of living in pathfinder areas, and they made valuable and important contributions.

As a Member who is interested in the subject and as Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, I am happy to respond to the Minister's earlier challenge to Opposition Members to be fully supportive of the Government's endeavours. I shall certainly ally myself and—I venture to suggest, because I think that I know my colleagues well enough—the Social Security Committee with that request and say that we shall all work positively to try to achieve the Government's objectives. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) said much the same, although, as he got a wee bit excited, he started shouting, which detracted a little from the bipartisan nature of the debate.

Debates such as this are important. I teased—from a sedentary position, which I know is not allowed—the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) when he complained that not enough hon. Members were present. I do not know how many Friday sittings he has attended, but we have a good turnout today and also a high-quality one. The hon. Gentleman made an important contribution to the debate, and I shall refer to his comments about David Webster's study shortly.

It has always puzzled me that the House still has, in this day and age, annual and fixed debates about the individual armed forces and the defence public expenditure papers. We have set-piece debates on all sorts of traditional matters, which are historical baggage from the time when the House had a direct and important interest in them, at the expense and to the detriment of some new areas of concern that deserve regular consideration by the House. I suggest that we make today's debate an annual one. Perhaps the Minister could speak to the business managers and see whether, once a year, we could spend a day monitoring the progress of the Government's policy.

I hope that the Government's policy will evolve—we have heard much evidence about the need for it to do so—and the hon. Member for Wentworth was right when he said that, to succeed, the policy would need to be flexible and also be implemented locally. All hon. Members will want to share their experiences of the working of the scheme in practice.

The Government may have rushed the introduction of the scheme. I do not blame them for that, because the expectations of the incoming Government were very high. I do not wish to carp, but it is asking a lot to take the whole country into the scheme after a 10-week pilot project from 1 January to the beginning of April. The work of Bob Alexander in north Tayside has been exemplary, and the culture in the Department for Education and Employment has changed signally for the better—I pay tribute to the work that has been done. However, it is asking a lot of everyone to change so dramatically in such a relatively short time. The timetable for the scheme may be too precipitate.

The House is deplorably bad at learning lessons and monitoring schemes. The previous Government implemented several schemes, such as the workstart

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

project, which did not appear to be properly evaluated. I do not know whether the present Government evaluated the previous schemes before they introduced their proposals, but those schemes did some valuable work from which lessons could have been learnt. The new scheme should last 10 or 15 years, not three or four, and it should be based on a consensus that is capable of surviving a change of Government. That is very important.

As an Opposition spokesman rather than a member of the Labour party, I believe that the Labour Government are now in a crucial position. Expectations are high, and the state of the economy gives them valuable flexibility. They must seize the moment.

The Labour Government are in a better position to introduce radical welfare reform and welfare-to-work schemes than the Conservatives were, because some of the decisions and some of the implementation of the schemes will be very hard to bring off. I do not seek to make a party political point, but it is true that people were highly suspicious that all that the Conservatives wanted was to save money—nothing more, nothing less.

Social security, as a policy subject, became boring during the 18 years of Conservative government because there was no philosophy—except that perhaps the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who is now the shadow Chancellor, tried at the end to get some cohesion and philosophy into the debate with his Mais lecture, which contained some interesting ideas.

The Conservatives approached social security reform with a salami-slicing technique, taking out £100 million here and £500 million there each year for 18 years. That did nothing. It did not address the problem, or even begin to. I am pleased that the Government have grasped the nettle and seized the opportunity. I am pleased that they are doing what they are doing. In so far as I can help, I am willing to help.

I should like to recommend a book that I took on holiday—and incidentally, I could take this opportunity to ask the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) for my copy back. I have responded to the Minister's challenge, and I shall give him one in return. Over Christmas, will he read Nick Danziger's book, "A Journey to the Edge"? It is in the tradition of Jack London and George Orwell, and the desperate thing about it is that in some areas the problems now are the same as if not worse than when they wrote.

I come from a rural area and do not have the experience of other hon. Members whose areas have much more difficult inner-city problems. I listened with great interest to the speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), and I take my hat off to her. It must be a difficult job to act as a constituency Member in such an area, and perhaps we do not do enough to help.

Nick Danziger's book is unbearable because it is about powerlessness and hopelessness. The Minister should read it, and so should everyone else in the House. It certainly persuaded me that something of a completely different nature needs to be tried. The Government deserve credit for introducing the policy. I think that the planets are in harmonic conjunction, and if the Minister does not grab the opportunity, it may not come again for 10 or 15 years, so it is important that we get it right.

Expectations are high. There have been programmes in the past, but the hon. Member for Croydon, North was right to say that they failed, and that people are now cynical about them. We must get the policy right this time.

Having said all that, I now want to endorse some of the points made by the hon. Member for Witney. I, too, have read the David Webster study. He gave written evidence to the Social Security Committee's tax and benefits study, which appears in our report. David Webster conducted an interesting study in Glasgow, a place that I know because it is my native city. He asks some legitimate questions about the "withering flowers" theory propounded by Alan Budd and Richard Layard.

According to that theory, if we leave people languishing in unemployment for long enough, they become unemployable. David Webster also expressed some doubts on the theory of replacement ratios and the idea that the benefits system was encouraging people to remain jobless. The Minister and his officials should read that work carefully.

Long-term unemployment, although it is a lagging indicator, tracks total unemployment almost exactly. That being so, perhaps we should not concentrate exclusively on supply side questions—although I realise that we have to start there. I also understand the point of starting with the 18 to 25-year-olds. It is important to get them early and try to do something.

None the less, we must tackle some of the other factors, too. Webster has some valuable suggestions to make in that direction. If we are to be flexible and have a system that evolves, why do we not do more pilots? Why do we not pick and mix, and try different things?

I have travel-to-work areas in my constituency with bad problems. The town of Hawick has just seen 200 lay-offs in a declining knitwear industry. The people who have been made redundant are struggling and do not know what to do next, because 80 per cent. of the manufacturing sector employment in that town derives directly from knitwear. Moreover, the town is geographically remote and receives no regional development assistance.

As well as the 10 or 12 pathfinder projects, we should encourage community-based local initiatives on a travel-to-work area basis throughout the country. We should be much more adventurous in how we invite people to tackle joblessness and employability issues in their areas. I agree with the right hon. Member for Charnwood that taking £3 billion and applying it to 122,000 18 to 25-year-olds is questionable. Although it is important to deal with young unemployable people, I, too, wonder whether that balance is right.

The Government should also consider immobility in the labour market. I am worried about the impact of housing benefit, which can freeze people permanently into difficult labour market situations.

I want the Government to consider other ways of approaching the problem. I am pleased that a start has been made and I hope that the gateway approach will develop and that we shall learn lessons from it. When we deal with the residual hard-to-employ group to which the hon. Member for Wentworth referred, it is essential to do so on a one-to-one basis, so that the scheme works. We should perhaps try giving employees, rather than employers, a top-up. There is an argument for giving prospective workers an incentive to find long-term work.

The Social Security Committee went to America and met people who are actively engaged in some of those matters, although the context was different, because America has a tight labour market and now has more people in work than it has had for the past 25 years. We do not, alas, enjoy such a context. I was struck by the fact that companies receive tax breaks for contributing to charities and community activities. Perhaps we should consider giving those blue chip companies, whose participation in welfare-to-work schemes is essential and welcome, a tax break if they put money into them. We could also encourage individuals by offering them tax breaks if they invest in welfare-to-work schemes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) and the hon. Member for Dundee, West mentioned transport. In rural areas, transport is an essential part of the package, without which it will not begin to work. Some areas have no public transport, and people have no cars because they cannot afford them. The same problem arises with child care, but that was dealt with adequately earlier in the debate. Transport needs to be looked at extremely carefully if areas such as south-east Scotland are to have any meaningful chance of access to the Government's proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford mentioned sanctions. I was formerly very uneasy about sanctions, but I am beginning to change my mind. When the Social Security Committee went to Wisconsin, we were told that there must be an element of sanction in order to "call out the cheats", in American jargon. We must face the fact that people abuse the system. It is not a nice thing to say, because it is our constituents who do it. The percentage of the population involved is not huge, but people work on the black economy and it is condoned. We must try to change that culture. Therefore, sanctions may have a role to play, as long as they are not rigidly applied.

The waiver scheme used in some of the states and counties in the United States can be used in conjunction with sanctions in a way that calls out the cheats, without causing personal catastrophe to those who are acting in good faith, but who can get caught in the rough justice to which rigidly applied sanctions will almost certainly lead. The Government have to be careful and to monitor how that works.

Some of the Minister's colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment have been studying the United States' experience and there are lessons to be learned, although we must be careful how we translate experience there into the conditions in this country.

This is an important debate, and I congratulate the Government on putting this policy at the heart of their political agenda. I shall do everything I can to assist the process. In return, I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that it is an evolving policy, which must be flexibly applied. If there are lessons to be learned, I hope that next year, or whenever we next debate the matter, the right hon. Gentleman will say that he has learnt those lessons from hon. Members on both sides of the House. A consensus on both sides of the House is essential if the scheme is to work.

12.55 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am particularly delighted to follow the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). We spent a week in Wisconsin as part of the Select Committee on Social Security, and I want to use this forum to thank him for his tremendous work as Chairman and to congratulate him on that role. When we were there, we also found that we have a lot to learn when it comes to soundbites. I heard many pithy little snippets, such as "Jobs or gaol", which I remember avidly, and also "Pay or paint"—I hope that we learned not to do that.

During the election campaign, which seems a long time ago, I knocked on doors in housing estates where we have about 90 per cent. unemployment, asking people to vote for a Labour Government. At times, the response was that politicians are all irrelevant—"What difference will it make to us whoever is in power?" I very much hope that the welfare-to-work programme will be the most glaring example of the difference that politicians can make and of the fact that a Labour Government can make a difference.

My constituency is a little like a cake slice of Birmingham, as it takes in part of the inner city and part of the very deprived outer city—the deprivation is worse in the outer city. A quarter of the unemployed people in my constituency are under 25, and 40 per cent. of them have been unemployed for more than six months. I take issue with the argument that the young are the unemployed group whose numbers will quickly be reduced. That is certainly not the case in my constituency. Three quarters of the unemployed have been out of work for more than two years, and the vacancy to claimant ratio is 1:1.9, so every job is being chased by two people. The pattern is stuck solid and there is little change.

What is welfare to work all about? The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) suggested that it is all about releasing money from one sector to another, and Opposition Members seem to agree. If that is what they really think, they still have not got it. They have not understood that it is part of a much wider package to deal with social exclusion. This is the start. This is a Government who look at the long term. If Opposition Members still cannot see that wider picture, let them keep travelling along this journey with us. I hope that they will learn.

A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward), asked how we would judge the success of the welfare-to-work programme and whether we merely look at the monthly unemployment count. There could be an increase in well-being if more people are working and fewer are unemployed, but one could argue that some people in low-paid jobs are simply choosing to take part-time jobs, so their sense of well-being is better. Those figures tell us little. The evidence that we found in America was that whole sections of the population simply withdraw from the official market and disappear from the statistics. That is one of the lessons that I hope we learned from Wisconsin: whole groups of people can fall off the edge, without it being clear what happened to them. A drop in the monthly count of those registering as unemployed may make us feel good, but it may mean that huge sections of the population have disappeared.

Let us consider a different measure: the annual benefit count. Which benefits and which groups are we to concentrate on? Should the fact that huge sections of the population do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled be considered a success? I suggest not. That is not an especially good indicator.

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

Another measure that has been used in the past is of households below average income, but if we have fast economic growth, the top rate of income may increase and push up the average, so there would appear to be a huge disparity, but it gives us no indication about real poverty.

All those measures are snapshots that do not tell us what happens to people's lives. We should remind ourselves that we are dealing with real people and with huge changes in patterns of life. If we want to assess what is happening to those people, we must consider factors such as lifetime income, the way in which they drift in and out of work, and whether we have realistic career patterns.

In Washington, we had an interesting encounter with a Mr. Rector at the National Heritage Institute. Those of us who met him will never forget him. He claimed to be one of the architects of the Wisconsin model; it is interesting how success has many fathers. When asked what his criteria were for judging the success of welfare to work, he referred to a reduction in case load, and a reduction in the number of out-of-wedlock births; if all children were born in wedlock, all society's problems could be solved. It would be wonderful if that were so, but it is an extremely narrow interpretation, and even the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), whose concern for the family is well known, found it somewhat simplistic.

We must be careful not to end up creating a working poor. Welfare to work is laudable, and we all want to work towards it, but in the United States we found that huge sections of the population worked full time and still could not meet their most basic costs. Simply to replace the non-working poor with the working poor is not progress. That is why I warmly welcome the introduction of the minimum wage as a base level to help us forward.

Mr. Gibb: Does the hon. Lady have any estimates of how many jobs would be lost as a result of the minimum wage? Could she cite the Confederation of British Industry, for example, or any other authorities on that question?

Ms Stuart: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman waits for the Low Pay Commission to report with its suggested minimum wage figure, and we can take the debate from there.

Opposition Members criticised the Government for concentrating on the young at this stage, but we must remember, as part of the aim of the welfare-to-work programme is the reduction of poverty, that young workers and part-time workers are most at risk from poverty in work. An Australian study on welfare to work said that having a job was necessary to escape poverty in the 1990s, but that now it was no longer sufficient to ensure that escape. Young and part-time workers went back to work, but their incomes were too low to address the basic problems.

How should we measure the success of the welfare-to-work programme if the static measures are not sufficient? If we consider it as part of the whole social exclusion programme, we can come up with some realistic measures. If people return to work and take part as stakeholders in society, we can measure a whole range of factors that will give us a much better indicator of well-being.

Welfare to work addresses poverty and social exclusion and provides opportunities. We should consider factors such as class mortality rates. Birmingham has very low life expectancy rates. In some wards, male life expectancy is 54 years. The causes are great poverty and high unemployment. Birth weights also give us a good indication, as do suicide rates among young men. Hon. Members who represent rural constituencies will know that suicide rates among young farm workers are rising dramatically. Those are all signs of a lack of well-being.

What about the numeracy and literacy to equip the next generation to take part in work? At a primary school in my constituency, about 60 per cent. of the children in a given age group will have moved on after one year. There is no stability; the school sees its role as providing a safe environment. It has become a pastime of many parents in the area, because they have no jobs, to seek rehousing continually. This is why we need to keep an eye on numeracy and literacy rates for the future.

As for the long-term unemployed, I was taken aback by the hon. Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), who suddenly expressed tremendous concern for people over 40 who have not worked for many years. Who put them in that position, if not the previous Administration? If they were so concerned about them, why did they do nothing—

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Lady agree that we should be concerned about people over 40 who are unskilled and who have been unemployed for long periods? Does it really make sense to concentrate the new deal wage subsidies on the young unemployed, who are already finding it easier to get work than the other group, thereby disadvantaging the latter even more?

Ms Stuart: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I disagree with him. I am of course extremely worried about that group, but we have inherited a huge problem and we have to start somewhere. I suggest starting with the generation that has not yet been wasted. We must start by giving those people opportunities, and then move on—it is an evolving programme.

There are no easy or cheap solutions. One universal lesson has been that this is not about saving money in the short term: it is about saving money in the long term if we can crack the problem of social exclusion. The Labour Government have a unique opportunity to bring about a change in the culture of benefits dependency. One of our most powerful tools will be the welfare-to-work programme. The pilot projects offer a tremendous opportunity from which to learn and on which to build, and I congratulate Ministers on the schemes already in place.

Meanwhile, I plead with the Opposition to cease their petty-minded attacks. Previous measures have not worked; now we have some positive models in place from which to learn. Given time, I am confident that they will tackle social exclusion. Let us give welfare to work a chance to develop; let us learn from it.

1.7 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I shall try not to engage in petty attacks. We have had quite a constructive debate this morning, and I hope to continue in that vein.

I believe that the new deal in the welfare-to-work programme illustrates a fundamental philosophical difference between us—which is hardly surprising. Some Labour Members may find it reassuring to see measures that reflect old-fashioned socialism, whereas some of the talk emanating from Ministers about flexibility in labour markets may not be quite so welcome to them. They prefer talk about job subsidies, and so on.

It is important to debate the subject not just from a philosophical point of view but on the basis of evidence about the way in which labour markets work and about which practices appear to be effective and which do not. By way of a preface to my remarks, I want to recall that we have had considerably greater success than many of our European partners in areas such as tackling youth unemployment. It would be very worrying if we set off towards a more regulated, structured and dirigiste labour market of the kind that would only emulate the failures that some of our continental partners have experienced.

We have all welcomed the goals of welfare to work. We would all like more people to work and fewer people to depend on benefits. Conservative Members have been happy to endorse specific elements of the policy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) picked out the active labour market policies as welcome in some respects; however, remarks such as those from the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) about the experience in Rotherham, one of the pathfinder regions, highlight one of the new deal's flaws, which is that it takes the lessons of local experiences, some of which I agree have been good, and tries immediately—and without any great evidence that they will be positive or constructive nationally—to spread them throughout the country. That will be dangerous, because it will lead to a massive distortion of the labour market. We have not had any opportunity to test the effect of such a policy.

The evidence that the Select Committee on Education and Employment took from the Policy Studies Institute showed that workstart had been effective with a very small subsidy concentrated over a short period. I am not sure that it is wise to extrapolate from that that a permanent subsidy at a much higher level will have correspondingly greater effects. In fact, the evidence suggested that such a long-standing subsidy at such a high level might be a waste of resources, and that it might be better to focus on the shorter term with a smaller amount.

We have heard much about the focus on the 18-to-24 age group and whether that is appropriate—a matter that the Select Committee considered in some detail. The figures provide compelling evidence that the emphasis in the new deal is wrong. The reduction in the number of people in that group from 250,000 people when the Labour party made its pledge to 122,000 surely suggests that there should be a change of emphasis. It is important that the Government take that on board. Indeed, as I always seek to be helpful, I tried my best in the Select Committee to emphasise that we wanted to help the Government to get over their reticence about not adhering strictly to the target that Labour set two years ago. The success of our labour market and economic policies has largely obviated the need to fulfil that pledge. The focus on 18 to 24-year-olds may be wrong.

The Government's response to the movements in the labour market has been somewhat worrying. The principal change of emphasis has not been from the young to the older unemployed. It seems that the Government are now talking about the flow of unemployed rather than about stock. The stock simply is not there any more so they have to consider the figures for flow. If one is looking at flow, there is never any need to reallocate because, over time, one will always find sufficient people to satisfy whatever criteria one sets. It troubles me that we may never reach the point of reallocation.

I have been pursuing the question of the new deal's objectives for some time because I do not believe that they were as well set out by the Government as they should have been. That tended to be borne out by the evidence that we took from Peter Davis, the man from the Pru. I know that work is on-going. I am somewhat troubled that, rather than resulting in a more precisely defined objective, the shift away from any objective involving a figure or a measurable acceleration in the trend rate of declining unemployment will result in a more nebulous concept of employability.

If are trying to measure whether we are getting value for the £3.5 billion of public money that is being spent. I am concerned that it is not possible to measure employability in any meaningful sense. All the evidence that the Select Committee has taken from many well-informed sources on the subject has tended to point to that conclusion. Evidence that we took about the position in Australia also bore out the suggestion that, after the long running of a similar scheme there, there was no generally agreed measure of success or failure. The only real measure has been that Australian business has become rather disaffected with the programme, and it has therefore been discontinued.

Such a policy, particularly the job subsidy element, will result in displacement, substitution, changed practices, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) said, and changes in the way in which employers make their decisions. Paragraph 8 of the Select Committee report accepts that the policy would displace not only some people who are currently short-term unemployed and who would otherwise have found work fairly quickly but some people who are currently in work. That is a serious possibility on which we should reflect at length. If we are talking about the introduction of a Government policy which, whatever its arguable merits in global terms or its long-term benefits to the labour market as a whole, will put some people who are currently in low-skilled jobs out of work, depriving them and their families of their livelihoods—as we found in the Select Committee report—that is a matter of considerable concern.

The new deal is focused principally on the marginal elements of the labour market, on those groups who have the greatest difficulty in finding employment, such as lone parents and the disabled. Increasingly, as the number of young, long-term unemployed declines, a greater emphasis is being placed on the idea that there is a mass, of whatever size, which nobody has tried to define, of the unemployable young or dysfunctional young—people who find it difficult to contemplate entry into the employment market.

Given that some of those people have significant difficulties in entering work, one has to consider the Government's contention that there is no fifth option in the new deal and the possible effects of that. Will inability to continue claiming benefits encourage people to discover that they are not as dysfunctional as they thought, and decide that they may be able to enter the labour market? Or will it drive them on to the black economy

[Mr. Graham Brady]

and off benefits into uncategorised groups such as those to which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) referred? If so, I cannot help wondering whether the Government will find a new fondness for the claimant count as a way of measuring unemployment because we may find that a large number of people suddenly disappear from the employment totals. We shall watch that with interest.

The Government are optimistic about their programme and like to claim that the business community is too. I have had a number of conversations not just with the small business sector, but with large businesses, which are concerned about the programme and do not regard it so optimistically. Understandably, they are not inclined to make a public song and dance about that. The Government must learn that people sometimes talk to Ministers differently from the way in which they talk to Opposition Members; Ministers should not be fooled by the slightly sycophantic approach of some business men when talking to them, rather than about Government policies.

The simple, inescapable logic when it comes to the job subsidy element of the new deal has been discussed before but is central to the case: if reducing costs for employers increases employment, increasing costs will lead to unemployment. The Government have not answered that point, and I do not believe they can, as it is logically inescapable. The hon. Member for Edgbaston was right to link the policy to the minimum wage—the two are inextricably linked.

The minimum wage is not about poverty, but is another facet of the welfare-to-work programme. But in this instance it is not about the transfer of unemployed people to work but about the transfer of £4 billion to £5 billion of benefit costs from the state to employers. It is an inescapable conclusion—I see that the hon. Member for Edgbaston is shaking her head. The minimum wage will reduce in-work benefits as income from people's employment rises, and there will be a significant claw-back for the Treasury. There will therefore be a big Government saving from the minimum wage, but that saving will be picked up by employers—there is a cost to employers.

Ms Stuart: Surely even the simplest economics tells us that, if people in work claim family benefits, the taxpayer will pick up the bill. Is there not something very wrong in the taxpayer picking up the bill for employers who pay such poverty level wages that employees must claim benefit?

Mr. Brady: It depends on one's policy. If the Government's policy is to reduce unemployment, they will have to accept that the costs of doing so will have to be met from somewhere. In transferring that £4 billion cost to business, the Government will make unemployment levels rise, and make it less likely that people will be in employment and more likely that they will be on benefit.

All hon. Members would prefer it if the taxpayer did not foot the bill for benefit payments, but we cannot simply magic away that cost. In imposing a minimum wage, one is not removing the need for payments but transferring the bill to employers. I argue—I do not think that any serious commentator has disagreed with this view—that loading those costs on to business will make businesses able to employ fewer people.

Mr. Dorrell: Would my hon. Friend like to make an observation on the irony of the intervention by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who seemed to suggest that it was wrong for the taxpayer to support employment on relatively low wages through family credit? I do not understand how that is reconcilable with her support for the £60-a-week subsidy that is a key part of the welfare-to-work package.

Mr. Brady: It is also at least arguable that the job subsidy will—because of the competitive effect—depress wage costs in the overall economy. Whereas transferring benefit costs to business may cost it £4 billion or £5 billion, the Government's subsidy programme will cost the taxpayer £3 billion to £4 billion. It may be no coincidence that the figures are not that different. The new deal is necessary partly to mitigate the most deleterious effects of the introduction of a minimum wage. That is why the Government have chosen to focus on marginal groups in the labour market—the long-term and young unemployed, the disabled and lone parents, all of whom will be hardest hit by the minimum wage.

As I said, distortion of the labour market is not only an academic concern: it is central to people's lives. We talk about distorting a labour market, and it sounds distant. However, if we are distorting a labour market so that it takes away someone's job or creates a situation in which someone is less likely to get back into work—and has not yet been unemployed for as much as six months, when they can qualify for the subsidy—we are possibly having a very real and damaging effect on the living and livelihood of individuals and their families.

The policy is old-fashioned socialist intervention in the labour market, and I do not believe that that works. From the rhetoric with which the Labour party fought the general election and some of Ministers' statements since, I had hoped that they had learnt something about how business works and how markets operate and that a flexible labour market generates more employment and higher living standards. In its current form, the policy indicates precisely the opposite: they have not learnt anything.

1.22 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his determination in holding to an ambitious timetable. It is no mean achievement to go, in less than a year, from scratch to the national launch of the main programme for the young unemployed. I also pay tribute to the unique design features of the new deal, which incorporates two strengths: first, local determination of the delivery vehicle, responding to local circumstances and the strengths of local providers and agencies; secondly—as hon. Members have already mentioned—flexibility. Ministers have left considerable scope for change and adaptation of the programme. Indeed, this Minister has shown considerable flexibility in many aspects of the programme, but the one that I would mention especially involves allowing participants the opportunity to sample the different options available before making their choice.

I have one caveat in respect of those two strengths: flexibility and local determination must not be achieved at the expense of quality, either of the programme itself or of the jobs and training that it delivers.

I shall deal now with the three aspects of the programme. The first is the gateway—the advice, guidance, counselling and support service. This is unique to the new deal, and its effectiveness will be vital to its success. It must be a high-quality service that provides a comprehensive range of other specialist services covering homelessness through to drug dependency. The gateway element will indeed be a major determinant of the success or failure of welfare to work.

The Employment Service will co-ordinate and lead the new deal programme and has responsibility for the gateway. It is widely recognised, certainly in London, that the Employment Service has an image problem—not, it must be said, all of its own making—because it is associated in the minds of many clients with its policing role in regard to the jobseeker's allowance. That perception may jeopardise its ability to deliver the gateway service. That is widely recognised, not least by the Employment Service itself, and steps have been taken to bring in outside agencies to help deliver the service. However, more needs to be done to strengthen its role in the gateway.

Employment Service staff have little experience in delivering the intensive advice and guidance required of the gateway. A comprehensive training programme for personal advisers to help them assess the needs of the client group properly would go a long way to address that weakness. In addition, many of the services provided by gateway could and should be sub-contracted and, where sensible—as has recently happened with a number of private sector organisations—the gateway itself should be subcontracted.

The second option is the employment option. This is likely to be the most popular, as it provides a job with an employer. We need to guard against its turning into the preferred option for all clients to the extent that other options are seen as second best. That can be assured only if the other options deliver real jobs as alternatives to the employment option.

An impressive list of national employers is lining up to provide places on welfare to work, to join the regional assessment panels and the other bodies and, indeed, to second staff to assist. I wholeheartedly welcome this, but experience in other countries shows that, to be successful, such programmes require the support and participation of small and medium enterprises. They are critical to the programme's success. We must target small enterprises in particular with our publicity and draw them into the programme. The new deal needs their support and good will, but it must ensure their compliance with the terms of the employment agreement. That will be a difficult balancing act, but we must try to prevent abuse.

Many small enterprises are too small to fulfil the terms of the employment agreement for the client group. That is especially true for the training element, and every effort should be made to contract this type of service on behalf of small enterprises through local consortiums.

In recent years, there has been an enormous growth in the services for small businesses provided through business links. Presenting the new deal in this way would be a much more positive approach and would link it to the development of the individual small business.

Finally, I shall deal with evaluation and adaptation. There has been a great deal of research into job subsidy. Indeed, the debate rages—we have hear something of it this morning—around the impact of deadweight, substitution and displacement. The existence of those effects is not in doubt, but their extent is. Numerous studies have been talked about this morning. There was no unanimity in the academic opinion canvassed by the Select Committee, but the studies tend to show that deadweight is substantial. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) mentioned additionality, which the studies show can be up to 30 per cent. However, those studies covered previous job subsidy programmes. The new deal is different because of the intensive support, advice and guidance offered, and the quality of the training to NVQ standard provided as part of each option.

Those features address some of the shortcomings of previous schemes, but it is important to adapt the programme to ensure that the subsidy is targeted and achieves the maximum benefit. That requires evaluation, but effective evaluation can be achieved only against clear objectives. Although the design document is a little vague, the Select Committee report outlines two main objectives for the programme—employability of young people and a sustainable reduction in the levels of long-term unemployment. If the programme is to be successful, we must try to measure the effects of subsidies on employability and adapt it accordingly.

Can that be achieved? The new deal will clearly have an impact on employability. First, it will keep participants in touch with the world of work. Secondly, it should improve the clients' motivation to find and retain employment. Thirdly—and perhaps most important—the relative skill levels of the participants will be improved. The new deal task force has addressed those issues and continues to do so. There is widespread recognition that to be successful the programme must clarify its objectives and monitor its delivery. That must include an evaluation of subsequent employment patterns to measure that improved employability so that we can improve the design and targeting of the job subsidy element of the programme.

We are only five or six days from the launch of the pathfinder and three months from the rollout of the national new deal programme. I look forward to fulfilling our manifesto objective of providing 250,000 jobs for young people and giving them new skills, enhanced motivation and, most important, hope for the future.

1.32 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Last week's vote on the abolition of lone parent premiums was more significant than we realised. More important than the Conservatives voting with the Labour Government against old Labour socialists was the size of the rebellion, with 47 Labour Members voting against the Government and at least 25 others abstaining, not to mention the many Labour Members who voted with the Government with a heavy heart and may not do so on another, similar occasion.

The Government can no longer claim to be a radical, welfare reforming Government. They realise that they have no chance of getting through any welfare reform measures worthy of the name. We shall have no more than some tinkering with the existing system. Of course,

[Mr. Nick Gibb]

it will be dressed up in the usual Alastair Campbell hype, but very little significant welfare reform will emanate from the Government.

We have many reviews: the child benefit review; the welfare-to-work task force; the tax and benefits task force; the social exclusion unit; the family policy committee; the pensions review; the long-term welfare review; the disability benefit review; the industrial injuries compensation review; the royal commission on long-term care; and, of course, the comprehensive spending review. Very little will come out of those reviews, apart from a large amount of hype, a press conference and perhaps, if the mood takes the Government, a statement to the House. Little, however, will happen in terms of policy.

We are talking about more than just a crisis at the Department of Social Security or the Department for Education and Employment: we are talking about a crisis across the whole of this new Government. Their welfare reforms were meant to form the basis of their economic policy. The initial injection of capital from the windfall tax was meant to give rise, in due course, to savings in the welfare budget, to spending falls and, ultimately, to higher tax revenues as more people got into work, giving the Government billions of pounds to spend on education and health. None of that will happen because the welfare reforms will amount to so little.

We can already see the problem with the tax and benefits task force. When it was established in May, the event was reported in all the newspapers. They used similar phrases, so we could see the hand of Charlie Whelan. One newspaper wrote that the panel of experts headed by the Barclays bank chief would recommend radical reform, including

"full scale merger of the tax and benefit system."

Another newspaper used a similar phrase, referring to

"integration of the tax and benefit system."

The reality, which we began to see in evidence from Department of Social Security officials to the Social Security Committee, in the green Budget and in the publication of the first report from the Taylor review, is that the change amounts merely to streamlining and modernisation of the tax and benefits systems. The only four issues being discussed are a working family tax credit, some tinkering with the level of national insurance contributions at the lower end of the income scale, a 10p rate of income tax as the lowest rate and a tinkering with benefit withdrawal tapers. That does not sound like the full-scale integration of tax and benefits.

Let us consider the working family tax credit. It is nothing more than family credit, which was highly successful and was introduced by the previous Government. The only difference is that it will be paid to the income earner rather than to the spouse who looks after the family.

Some of us on the Social Security Committee suspect that the change is likely to result in an accounting benefit for the Government. Family credit is clearly public expenditure, but the working family tax credit, to the extent that it results in the income earner being relieved of tax instead of having the relief paid to the family, will result in the benefit being accounted for as tax forgone rather than as public expenditure. Approximately two thirds of all recipients of family credit pay income tax. With family credit costing about £2 billion a year, there could be a significant shift in the way in which public expenditure is accounted for. In other words, the policy is pure window dressing and no substance.

The essence of welfare-to-work programmes is to get people into work. In those terms, the previous Conservative Government had the most successful welfare-to-work programme ever. For at least four consecutive years, unemployment fell month in, month out. Unemployment is now at 5.2 per cent., which is lower than the rate in our major competitor countries in Europe. In Germany and France, the figure is 12 per cent. and in Spain, youth unemployment is a staggering 40 per cent.

This Government have inherited a golden legacy, with steady growth, low inflation and falling unemployment. If the new Labour Government had continued with the same economic policies, the golden legacy would have continued undamaged. That is what the public believed would happen when they voted for Labour on 1 May.

Mr. Keetch: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that some Liberal Democrat Members have criticised the Government for maintaining the economic performance of the previous Administration and for keeping within their financial limits? In many ways, this Government are continuing with the policies followed by the previous Government.

Mr. Gibb: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. In some ways, he is right. The Government have stuck to the spending plans of the previous Government, but they have also undone many of their economic policies. Since 1 May, there have been five interest rate rises and an emergency Budget raising £5 billion a year from the nation's pension fund. That will have to be paid for by higher contributions that, for the average person, will amount to about £20 a month. That Budget also raised £5.2 billion from the windfall tax and in November a further £2 billion was extracted from the corporate sector as a result of the abolition of advance corporation tax and the introduction of quarterly corporation tax payments.

As a result of that and the high level of sterling, it is clear that the economy will slow down next year to such an extent that unemployment is likely to rise. Indeed, in his pre-Budget reports the Chancellor has acknowledged that there will be a slowdown in the economy. It really is a scandal. If only the Government had continued with the same economic policies, unemployment would have continued to fall and welfare to work really would have been the order of the day.

It is in some ways ironic, if it were not so tragic, that the windfall tax, which will raise £5.2 billion—the first instalment having been paid at the beginning of this month—will eventually be spent on welfare-to-work projects. The very act of raising the money by imposing the new tax will contribute to the contraction in the economy instigated by the Government, and that contraction will lead to higher unemployment. The policy designed to reduce unemployment will actually contribute to it.

One of the most successful welfare reform measures introduced by the previous Conservative Government was the jobseeker's allowance. In addition to a successfully

managed economy, the jobseeker's allowance contributed significantly to falling unemployment throughout the country month in, month out, for the past four years.

The jobseeker's allowance—which was opposed at every step by Labour in opposition, but is not now to be scrapped by Labour in government—involves contracts between the Employment Service and those claiming the benefit to ensure that effective steps are taken to obtain a job. It works because, as well as providing advice and help in finding a job, at the end of the day there is an element of compulsion.

With the Government's new welfare-to-work programme, it is difficult to ascertain precisely what sanctions will be applied to those who, in the Prime Minister's words, decide to go for the fifth option.

In respect of the new deal, there is a clear division in the Department of Social Security ministerial team about how much compulsion should be applied. The Secretary of State said on the BBC's "Question Time" on 2 October this year that compulsion was absolutely not the issue, but the Minister for Welfare Reform, in an article entitled "Reinventing Welfare: a Response to Lawrence Mead's paper 'From Welfare to Work: Lessons from America'" said:

"Mead criticises voluntary approaches for assuming the poor are all primed to work and only need a better chance."

The Minister agreed with that, saying:

"Here he is surely right. Policy makers need to recognise that the unemployed are not dashing around all the time in a frantic search for a job."

The Secretary of State does not want compulsion, whereas the Minister for Welfare Reform does. Who is right? Perhaps the Minister could intervene in the dispute between his colleagues at the Department.

A further paradox in the Government's welfare-to-work policy is the introduction of the minimum wage. Professor Baine has been quoted in *The Times* as saying, in what I consider a very callous phrase:

"I would be surprised if there were not some job losses but the question is whether those jobs would be better lost anyway."

Perhaps his tone would be different if the job in question were his own.

The Department of Trade and Industry has calculated that a minimum wage of £4.15 an hour, with an assumption of a 50 per cent. restoration of wage differentials, would destroy more than 1 million jobs. The Confederation of British Industry, which I was hoping the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) would mention, has said that a minimum wage of £3.20 an hour would lead to significant job losses.

The question whether the minimum wage will be applied to the groups of people who are the subject of the welfare-to-work programme also arises. Will it apply to lone parents who are seeking a job for the first time, to young long-term unemployed people and to disabled people? If so, who will pay those wages? The £60 a week subsidy is a drop in the ocean compared with the weekly wage bill of someone who earns £4 an hour. The insanity of a minimum wage policy, combined with the damage that will be caused by signing the social chapter and all the economic problems that measures taken by the Government since 1 May have caused, means that, far from there being a welfare-to-work policy, the Government have created a work-to-welfare policy.

Even aside from all those issues, there is no evidence that welfare-to-work schemes work. *The Economist* said in March:

"Labour isn't thinking . . . Labour is underestimating the difficulties. Its plan to fund the job creation scheme with a one off windfall tax on the privatised utilities, even though the costs of any such scheme will be recurring, not one off . . . Most of those helped by workfare will be given low paid jobs; these will have to be supported by in-work benefits, a continuing cost to the taxpayer. Welfare to work is not a cheap idea and it will not necessarily reduce the overall employment count."

Welfare to work will certainly not result in savings of billions of pounds—as the Government claim and which they have earmarked for spending on health and education.

Indeed, research conducted by National Research Associates in 1995 on 17 wage subsidy schemes from 10 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development showed that at least half the subsidy went on people who would have found a job anyway. The most likely effect of such schemes is an incentive to employers not to take on the school leavers they would normally have taken on and instead to take on a young employed person with a £60 a week subsidy.

The Employment Policy Institute paper, "Employment Subsidies and the Intermediate Labour Market" poured scorn on the proposals. It said:

"If take-up of the recruitment subsidy element of the New Deal does proves to be low"—

which it may be in places such as those represented by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman)—

"relatively more emphasis will have to be placed on environmental and voluntary sector programme options".

particularly in "depressed localities".

"This possibility raises concern about the overall effectiveness of the New Deal given that community jobs programmes, whatever their broader merits, do little to improve the long-run unemployability of participants. The European Commission . . . concludes that studies indicate that community jobs schemes may have undesirable consequences for the future career prospects of participants. Such schemes risk diverting participants on to 'side tracks' which sometimes turn out to be dead-ends, and make it difficult for them to return to regular employment."

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): The hon. Gentleman has raised two points which I could not let pass. One was about the overall costs of the scheme. Does he know of the pilot of all pilots that is being conducted by Nortel in north London? It has embarked on the scheme, ahead of anything, by investing £200,000 to train young men and women between the ages of 18 and 24 and provide for day release. If they are successful, they are then put on the company's modern apprenticeship schemes. One of our strongest leading companies in the country thinks that it worth spending almost a quarter of a million pounds on such a scheme. If that is not recognising the value of investment, I do not know what is.

The other point is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief. What the hon. Member said will be sufficient for the time being.

Mr. Gibb: That £200,000 is not the billions of pounds that we were promised before and during the election

[Mr. Gibb]

campaign would arise from the great panacea of the welfare-to-work scheme. We were told that that money would be pumped into education. That was the basis of the Government's economic policy and election strategy.

The level of unemployment in an economy is directly linked to the level of activity in the economy. The jobseeker's allowance sought to ensure that people available for work were genuinely looking for work. When that was coupled with a successful economic policy, unemployment rolls tumbled. Indeed, David Webster's report, which has been mentioned several times today, showed a direct correlation between the number of long-term unemployed and the overall unemployment level. If he is right—many hon. Members have implied that he is—subsidising the long-term unemployed is an ineffective policy.

There we have it: the whole basis of the Government's economic policy—of their claim that they could pump billions of pounds of extra money into education and health without raising extra taxes—is found to be flawed. The basis of Labour's policy is

"We will reduce spending on the costs of unemployment and increase it on education."

None of the measures so far proposed under the title of welfare to work will result in the saving of one penny of taxpayers' money.

Instead, when we take into account the ludicrous policies for a minimum wage and the adoption of the social chapter, the five interest rate rises, the £10 billion of tax rises in the contractionary Budget in July and the £2 billion extra corporation tax a year announced in November, we see that the economy will slow down and unemployment will soon follow.

On top of that slowing down, it became clear after last Wednesday's vote that the Government will no longer be able to get any of their radical welfare reform measures through their party. That vote signalled the beginning of the end of the current Secretary of State for Social Security, but it also signalled the end of any measure that the Minister for Welfare Reform might propose. It signalled the end of thinking the unthinkable; it signalled the end of tough sanctions; it signalled the end of being able to save billions of pounds from the social security budget to pump into education and health; it signalled a huge dent in the Government's public spending strategy; and it signalled the complete chaos in the Government on welfare reform.

That vote also exposed the fundamental flaw in all the rhetoric of Labour in opposition about shifting resources from the welfare budget to education and health. The policy is beginning to unravel, including the clever-clever tax on pension funds that the Government thought nobody would notice—but which people have noticed—and the disastrous policy on savings that the Government thought people would swallow, but have not. We have seen the nanny state bossiness over beef on the bone and now we see that new Labour cannot deliver on the most fundamental aspect of its social and economic policy.

1.51 pm

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am grateful for the opportunity to report to the House on the excellent progress that has been made in preparing to implement the new deal for the young unemployed in south-west London. I also wish to share with the House some of the insights that I have gained from directly participating in and assisting with those preparations in my constituency of Wimbledon in the London borough of Merton. I feel that I have been able to act as an ambassador for the new deal.

The three major parties are represented in the constituencies covered by the local Employment Service district, and all the local Members of Parliament, from whichever party, have played a role in helping with the new deal. Indeed, the Employment Service district report stated:

"Local MPs . . . have agreed to use their existing employer networks to spread the word about New Deal through organisations such as the Merton and Kingston Chambers of Commerce and the Sutton Business Federation."

I welcome and applaud the involvement of all my parliamentary colleagues in the area in advocating and promoting the new deal.

I also wish to draw attention, as other hon. Members have done, to the central importance of the new deal in the context of welfare reform. The new deal is the most exciting of all the new projects introduced by the new Government and is the touchstone by which all our achievements in this Parliament will be judged and the foundation on which the rest of our proposals will stand or fail. That is because the Government are committed to reducing the benefit bill, but as a Labour Government they recognise that that can be done only by helping those who can work, and want to work, off welfare and into work.

I said that I would report on the progress of the new deal in south-west London. On 14 November the delivery plan for our new deal was presented by Colin Purtill, the director of the local Employment Service, to the regional panel. I am delighted to say that it was one of the few to receive category A approval—a rating that testifies to the desire of all concerned to make the plan work, and to the fact that the Employment Service can design local provision of real quality based on a flexible planning partnership approach tailored flexibly to local needs.

The key elements of the local delivery plan in south-west London include the following. First, there is a flexible approach to the design of the gateway, based on five focal points in Mitcham, Wimbledon, Sutton, Kingston and Epsom, with the use of independent advisers as well as Employment Service staff.

The Employment Service recognises, as I do and as the Government do, that young people out of work have a multiplicity of needs. They are often without a home, and may also lack skills. That is why we need to draw on the expertise and advice of many outside the Employment Service in the design of the gateway. That is the approach that we are taking in south-west London.

Secondly, we are establishing a management consortium that includes, among others, the local training and enterprise council AZTEC, SOLOTEC—a local voluntary sector consortium—and the local authorities. The fact that it also includes employer representatives and other partners not intending to act as providers has been a key element in getting us category A approval. Such a consortium is seen as the best way of capturing local expertise and making sure that the voluntary sector in particular and the social economy in general plays a leading role in making the new deal work locally.

The final aspect of our delivery plan that I shall highlight is the clear commitment to quality assurance, to the monitoring of progress and evaluation, and in particular to equal opportunities. That means that the new deal in south-west London will not simply cream off the best among the young unemployed; underlying it will be the principles of fairness, of equal opportunity, and of opening up access to all.

Commenting on the local delivery plan, Ian Parkes, the managing director of AZTEC, said:

"Getting ready for the New Deal in South West London has gone very well—we are well prepared—only perhaps a little frustrated that we have to wait till April to get started".

Colin Purtill of the local Employment Service told me that many employers had responded enthusiastically to the new deal, and would even take on young people without subsidies. He asked me to raise with the Minister during the debate the idea of getting this message across more strongly so that more employers might take on young people under the new deal without subsidies. That would allow resources to be directed at those with really difficult needs.

I take this opportunity to congratulate publicly all who have contributed to the successful design of our local delivery plan. More than 100 organisations, with their expertise and enthusiasm, made the consultation process so successful, and I know that they are as committed as I am to making the implementation of our delivery plan an equal success.

The Minister knows of our commitment in south-west London to making the new deal work for our community. Indeed, he recently visited a small business in my constituency to emphasise, with the parliamentary spokesperson for the Federation of Small Businesses, the importance and value of employment in small businesses to the overall success of the new deal strategy.

The Minister will be aware of the view voiced strongly in south-west London during the consultation process that, if the new deal is to work anywhere, it must work there. London has 15 per cent. of the total number of young unemployed people; 50 per cent. of those are black or from other ethnic communities, and 50 per cent. have no qualification higher than NVQ level 1.

The commitment and self-confidence that I have found in south-west London to helping the Government implement the new deal was driven home to me forcibly during the consultation process. I had the privilege of chairing one of the key meetings during the consultation phase, which took place at the YMCA and drew on that organisation's considerable experience of foyer projects in Wimbledon.

That meeting brought together more than 40 organisations, including representatives of statutory and voluntary bodies, housing associations, further education colleges, local employers, trade unions and local churches. They all said with one voice that the new deal was an opportunity to focus the local community's considerable resources and energy on a common purpose, and an opportunity to build on existing local partnerships such as the Wandle valley partnership for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The director of the Merton Voluntary Services Council, Ms Chris Frost, said that the consultation process had been excellent,

"building on well-established local networks and long experience of good co-operation between statutory and voluntary bodies."

The industrial chaplain in Merton, Andrew Wakefield, said:

"Despite the tight time constraints, a genuine process of consultation took place, for the first time in a long time."

In his closing remarks, the chief executive of the YMCA, Stuart Page, said:

"Look around at the resources represented by those present at this seminar today. There are more than enough means to solve the problems suffered by the young unemployed in this district."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said, if we look around this Chamber we see that each of us has a role to play and a responsibility to make the new deal work.

The new deal is not a half-hearted stab at paying lip service to the Government's duty to ensure that the young have life opportunities; it is a thorough strategy for social regeneration and national renewal, which puts young people's needs to the fore.

Mr. Heald: Some 250,000 people over the age of 25 are registered as long-term unemployed—out of work for more than two years—but only some 100,000 people under the age of 25 are unemployed. Can it be right to spend £3.1 billion on the 100,000 and £350 million—a tenth of that—on the 250,000? The emphasis in the new deal structure is wrong.

Mr. Casale: Had the hon. Gentleman been here earlier in the debate he would know that that point has been raised a number of times and has been adequately dealt with.

The Government's pledge to create 250,000 jobs for the young unemployed is at the core of our project for national and social renewal. If the new deal is successful, it will be the greatest living monument to the new Government, and we shall share the credit with hon. Members on both sides of the House who contribute to its success in their local communities.

In reconnecting young people with work, we shall reconnect them with a society from which they have become disaffected because it seemed not to care. The dynamic gains to be made from the new deal can and must be reinvested to tackle unemployment among other groups, particularly the long-term unemployed and people with learning difficulties and physical disabilities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) said. We must put those resources at the heart of the on-going process of social regeneration and our commitment to national renewal.

I am delighted to have had an opportunity to report on the progress that has been made in south-west London, and I commend the report to the House.

2.2 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Welfare to work has been highlighted as a central part of the Government's programme. It builds on the series of employment and training programmes introduced over the past 25 years to ameliorate some of the effects of unemployment. The main goal of the Government's proposal is to take 250,000 people defined as long-term unemployed off the

[Mr. John Randall]

dole queue. That job has been made much easier as a result of the continuing fall in unemployment which the Government inherited from their predecessor.

The Conservative party shares the ambition of reducing unemployment. The continuing growth in new jobs reminds us that the main source of job creation is a successful economy. That will always be the case, but it does not mean that there are not specific problems associated with long-term unemployment which must be dealt with by other means.

As for the details of the Government scheme, no matter how important the objective it does not free us from critically analysing what is proposed. We share the desire to reduce unemployment, but as the Opposition it is our responsibility to highlight potential difficulties, while acknowledging the strengths of the scheme.

Unemployment is bad for the people who experience it and bad for the economy. It demoralises the individual and places strain on their families. It leads to de-skilling and a lowering of personal motivation. The longer people are unemployed, the more their skills deteriorate. They become increasingly ineffective in their search for new work, and employers become more unlikely to take them on to the payroll.

The exclusion of the long-term unemployed from the economy is not only a waste of human talent; it is economically damaging. If a large number of potential workers are excluded from participation in the labour market, it can lead to increasing skills shortages. There is a risk of generating a vicious circle of rising inflation and rising unemployment, which leads to reduced Government revenue and pushes up social security spending.

That unemployment is a bad thing and successful job creation a good thing is self-evident. The question is how best the latter can be done and how effective schemes such as the one proposed by the Government will be in reducing long-term unemployment.

There has been something of a sea change in that area in recent years, not least on the Labour Benches. There has been a steady but gradual shift in the welfare-to-work debate. It is now widely recognised that the Government are under an obligation to the taxpayer as well as to the unemployed. It is no longer acceptable or desirable from any perspective or point of view to allow the unemployed simply to accept financial support from the state without taking on reciprocal responsibilities in return. It is in the interests of both the unemployed and those in work to minimise unemployment.

When the Beveridge system was first designed, it was assumed that after a certain period payments would be conditional on the recipient accepting work or training. That original aspiration was never put into practice. The debate has rightly returned to that point of reference. In employment terms, the world has changed beyond recognition from the days of Beveridge. Global economic and technological change has resulted in unemployment levels that were not envisaged at the time of his report. Now, people may have to change jobs several times in a lifetime. That changing pattern of employment poses new challenges and creates new problems.

One of the problems of having high levels of unemployment, particularly of the long-term sort, is the strain that it places on other finances. The average cost of an unemployed person claiming benefit works out at roughly £3,900 per annum, which amounts to a total of £7.16 billion or 10 per cent. of the social security budget. In addition, the Government lose on average £6,000 in unpaid taxes and national insurance, so the total cost to the Exchequer is in excess of £9,000 per unemployed individual—10 per cent. of the social security budget, as I said.

Therefore, the Exchequer impact of high unemployment is considerable, although an accurate assessment of the respective costs and savings is dependent on the unemployed group that are returned to work. The average payment to the under-25s is around 70 per cent. of the average for all unemployed claimants. That means that savings for that group would be nearer £750 million, compared with the £1 billion for the over-25s.

The problems associated with the job subsidy element of the proposed welfare-to-work scheme are not unique to this scheme. They are difficulties that have been identified by a host of countries that have adopted similar initiatives. Wage subsidies form a key part of the new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds and for those who are unemployed for more than two years. The rationale behind the subsidy is that it is financed by transferring part of the benefit cost to a prospective employer. That way the new employee earns more than the dole, while the employer cuts his or her costs. Meanwhile, the Exchequer is no worse off, because it would have paid out that money anyway.

As we witness the continuing fall in unemployment, the problem of those who would find jobs regardless of such schemes is clearly illustrated. That makes it difficult to measure the true value of such initiatives. A proportion of those who benefit from the subsidy would have returned to employment in any case.

An evaluation of 17 wage subsidy schemes in 10 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries estimated that that applied to 50 per cent. of the jobs covered by the schemes. That must be put into perspective. The report was produced at the same time that the British workstart scheme was piloted by the previous Government. Workstart offered employers subsidies of £60 a week for six months to take on people who had been unemployed for more than two years. A report on the scheme by the Institute of Employment Studies found that it met its main aim of influencing employers' selection decisions in favour of the long-term unemployed.

I know that the Government carefully considered many of the flaws in the schemes when they prepared the new deal. The commitment to one day a week's training, combined with employer contracts, may deter the more cynical, who are simply interested in attracting a subsidy. That, alongside the co-operation of training and enterprise councils in tailoring the training to the specific needs of the local labour market, is vital. I know from speaking to people at my local TEC that that is important if they are to deliver their side of the bargain.

The OECD report suggests that the targeting of subsidies can make them more effective in combination with training, as proposed in the new deal. The longer-term effect of such schemes is felt in putting the unemployed back in touch with the world of work. It may well be that, even if the subsidised element is not strictly efficient in creating longer-term opportunities, it will help to re-motivate the unemployed.

Another problem is of people being substituted through schemes. I know that the Government are committed to monitoring the position. Employers do not sack people to replace them with those from the scheme, but the problem comes from the employer who would have replaced an employee in the normal way, who then recruits someone from the scheme. That will be difficult to assess in practice.

There are many international examples of workfare programmes. The overall value of the scheme will be established only in practice. I wish it well, and hope that any deficiencies that may materialise can be ironed out, for the benefit of those most in need. Only time will tell whether this large sum is being well spent.

2.11 pm

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): We have had an extremely good debate on the Government's welfare-to-work proposals. Hon. Members of all parties have been constructive and positive, with the exception of the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb); I am amazed that he could keep a straight face, because the weirdest economic logic was involved in arguing that we do not need a welfare-to-work programme and a new deal because the previous Government's macro-economic strategy would have solved all the problems and brought unemployment down. That is complete nonsense. I pick up on it because it takes to extremes an argument based on a misconception shared by many Conservative Members.

The argument is that unemployment is falling because of the previous Government's macro-economic strategy, and that, if we carried on cutting interest rates, it would fall further and we would not have a problem. The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton said that we should continue the policy from before the general election, when the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), the former Chancellor, did not put up interest rates, despite the fact that the economy was growing.

Mr. Gibb: My right hon. and learned Friend may not have put them up at that time, but he had put them up; he did not cut interest rates for the whole period. To say that our economic policy was based solely on cutting interest rates is a travesty of the truth. The previous Government conducted a sensible economic, monetary and fiscal policy. Since 1 May, we have had an over-zealous monetary policy and huge tax rises.

Yvette Cooper: That so-called sensible macro-economic, monetary and fiscal policy caused the two deepest recessions since the war and put millions of people into unemployment—more than at any other time. The claim that Conservative macro-economic management is good for jobs will seem a bit rich to people in Pontefract and Castleford who were pushed out of work in the 1990s recession and had very little help from the previous Government to get back into work.

The problems of unemployment are not just to do with macro-economic management, bad though the previous Government's management was. The people struggling to find jobs in my constituency are clear evidence of the huge need for a new deal, especially for the young unemployed—despite the decline in youth unemployment. In Wakefield district, we did a survey of 18 to 25-year-olds who have been out of work for more than six months—the people who will be targeted by the new deal—and found that 48 per cent. of them had no educational or vocational qualifications at all. That is shocking; it is much worse than the national average, which is about 25 per cent. It points up the problem with our skills base. Long-term unemployment is concentrated among the unskilled, right across the country. That cannot be solved purely by macro-economic management. We need to examine the particular needs and problems of the people who are out of work.

The demand for high skills has risen in recent years, but this country's skills supply has not kept up with it. In countries where the supply of skilled labour has kept up, the relative position of the unskilled has not deteriorated; whereas in Britain, because the former Government failed to encourage the growth of skills in line with demand for them, skills shortages developed and the wages of those with qualifications kept rising, while the living standards, pay and chances of finding a job of those denied qualifications continued to fall. Hence the need for a new deal.

The problem continues from one generation to another. Twenty per cent. of the sons of the unemployed are unemployed themselves and 67 per cent. of the daughters of women with degrees will take degrees themselves, but only 8 per cent. of the daughters of women with no qualifications will go on to get degrees. From one generation to another, the same disadvantages are being passed down. We must put a stop to that. It explains why we are starting with young people and the young unemployed.

I take the serious point of the hon. Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) about the problems of unemployment among the over-40s and over-50s. The people of Pontefract and Castleford, however, would find his party's concern slightly more plausible if, during the heavy industrial transition of the 1980s, more had been done to help older workers into new jobs when their former jobs in mining and the heavy industries were destroyed. We need to tackle generational injustice, in other words, not just the lack of employment opportunities.

Mr. Brady: Does the hon. Lady accept that there will come a point when youth unemployment has fallen to a certain level, whereupon the programme should be refocused? If so, what would that level be?

Yvette Cooper: As we bring down youth unemployment, it will be right to help other groups if the resources are then available. Other groups will need different kinds of help, so a new deal for the over-50s would be differently shaped. We must not, however, be complacent or suppose that, because we have got youth unemployment down, we have solved the problem. The group of people who will be left among the unemployed young will be the most difficult to help. The fact that so many people in my area are entirely without qualifications is very worrying.

We talked to those people in focus groups about what they wanted, and they said that they just wanted jobs—they did not want education and training. That shows the need to change attitudes, to help those people to see that education and training will help their long-term prospects, not just their immediate chances of earning.

[Yvette Cooper]

Conservative Members asked whether supporting a job subsidy was incompatible with arguing that the reason for introducing a minimum wage is to get rid of unfocused employment subsidies through family credit. There is a big difference between top-up benefits and the minimum wage. With top-up payments, in effect, we subsidise the worst employers, allowing them to keep on cutting wages to £3, £2.50, £2 and £1.50 an hour; they know that the state will just top it up. That subsidy could go on indefinitely. It is unfocused and it does not target the people we want to help.

If we have a minimum wage, we stop subsidising bad employers and such exploitation, and we positively subsidise the group of people whom we want to help. Conservative Members mentioned that effective subsidies are those that are targeted. We target the subsidy. We know exactly how much it costs and we focus it on the people whom we want to help to get jobs, who we know would not get them otherwise.

This has been a positive debate. I welcome other hon. Members' contributions on the new deal in their constituencies. In my constituency, too, a strong partnership has developed. People there believe strongly in opportunities for young people, for lone parents and for the long-term unemployed. I hope that we shall be able to focus in particular on the education and training element in the new deal, because that is the most powerful way in which to tackle long-term inequality, long-term unfairness and long-term unemployment.

I congratulate the many members of my local Employment Service who have been putting together the positive new deal. A commentator said two days ago that there was a danger that the Government would make welfare to work the cornerstone of their programme for the next five years. Frankly, I hope that it is the cornerstone, because the programme is the most important thing that we could introduce.

2.21 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate, which has been interesting and well informed. In the nine minutes remaining, I shall do my best to do justice to the high calibre of the contributions.

I think that everyone has recognised that, when we address welfare to work, we confront an enormous challenge of tremendous significance for the future of our whole society. Our welfare-to-work policy tackles social exclusion and aims to ensure that we bring employment, training and benefits to people in the right way, so that they have the standard and quality of life that we want in a civilised society, and so that they can contribute as full members of that society, which is obviously good both for them and for the character of the whole community.

I should like to pick up on a point raised by several hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), my hon. Friends the Members for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) and for Edmonton (Mr. Love), and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). They called for flexibility and asked the Government to learn from the experience of the programme as it develops. I pledge that the Government will do just that. We shall listen to hon. Members on both sides of the House, just as we shall listen to people from all parts of the community, because it is important that we get this right. We need to draw on the wealth of experience, innovation and ideas, to change the way in which welfare works for good, and to change it for the better.

An important feature of the new deal is the decentralisation that we have introduced, drawing in ideas from local partnerships. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) could not be more wrong in claiming that we were somehow picking examples from here and there and banging them down indiscriminately throughout the country. I appreciated his contorted effort to portray the new deal as centralist and as showing the dead hand of old-style socialism. I could not recognise the description and, judging by the faces of his hon. Friends, I do not think that they could, either. The welfare-to-work programme is innovative and flexible. It draws on the strengths of each local community in responding to the particular needs of each local community.

I shall address as many as I can of the issues and questions that have been raised, including those raised by the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell). The priority that has been given to the young unemployed has been questioned. Like so many of my hon. Friends—my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) and for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and others—I make no apology for the priority that we are giving to the needs of the young unemployed.

Anyone who knows the situation in the inner cities, on the estates and in pockets of deprivation in suburban and rural areas, knows that record youth unemployment under the previous Government blighted the lives of millions, inflicted incalculable damage on the fabric of society and saw an explosion of drug abuse and crime. Anyone who knows those areas is aware that something has to be done to ensure that nothing like it happens again.

As for there being "only" 120,000 young unemployed people now, that means that 120,000 young people face drifting on, month after month, towards long-term unemployment.

Mr. Dorrell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I am sorry, but I have so much to cover in a short time that I cannot give way.

For each one of those young people, his or her unemployment is 100 per cent. For every month that goes by, there are another 15,000 people passing the threshold of six months' unemployment. Surely it is right that we take every action we can to enhance their employability, to provide them with work experience and to equip them with skills so that they can get, and stay in, jobs.

Mr. Dorrell: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way.

The right hon. Gentleman has just said that the long-term young unemployed face a lifetime of unemployment. I agree that dealing with the problem is an important priority, but we must deal with facts, not illusions. Does he accept that, in his evidence to the Select Committee, Jon Stern said:

"The probability that someone aged under 25 and unemployed over 6 months in April 1996 would have left unemployment by April 1997 was 82 per cent."?

It is simply not true to say that, once past the six-month barrier, those people face a lifetime of unemployment. Within one year, they have an 82 per cent. chance of employment. Let us deal with facts—that is not to belittle the problem.

Mr. Smith: I want to deal with facts: what about the other 18 per cent? That is precisely the group on which we need to focus to ensure that those people get jobs. The right hon. Gentleman's argument is like claiming that just because 95 per cent. of people are not damaged in road accidents, it is not a priority to deal with the remaining 5 per cent. We must focus attention on those who most need it, and the new deal is designed to do precisely that. That is one reason why an early priority for gateway will be to get those who are close to job readiness immediately into unsubsidised employment. That also answers the point about deadweight that the right hon. Gentleman and a number of other Conservative Members raised.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the danger of a subsidy giving a perverse incentive to recruit the young unemployed. The subsidy provides a more level playing field for a group that has historically fared badly in the labour market. It is an incentive for employers to consider what those young people have to offer when they have had the benefit of basic skills training, help to become motivated and assistance to get them to the right position to be able to take on a job—that is what the gateway and the new deal will provide.

It has been claimed that the previous Government cut youth unemployment and somehow delivered Labour's promise in advance. Which Government increased youth unemployment by 400,000? None of the Conservative Members acknowledged that, still less apologised for it, as they should.

I echo the praise of many of my hon. Friends for what has been accomplished by the Employment Service. I place on record my appreciation of the work that is being done to prepare personal advisers for their role in the new deal, which will be particularly important. We can all see how critical that first interview will be for young people early in January, when they will realise that this programme is on their side and that it offers them the opportunity of gaining the skills and chances that have so far passed them by. We wish those personal advisers every good fortune in the important work that they will undertake.

I shall answer the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) when he drew attention to the particular need for employment opportunities for disabled people and those with learning difficulties. He recounted the moving experience of his constituent with Down's syndrome. I, too, have seen the remarkable transformation that can be accomplished by such support and job coaching—by, with and on behalf of people who have often been written out of the script of employment. The £195 million that the Chancellor allocated in the Budget for the new deal for disabled people and those suffering long-term sickness will bring about more projects to pilot innovative work on access, dedicated training and job coaching, to help many more such people into work.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) asked whether normal terms and conditions would operate for those employed under the programme. That is one of our precise objectives for people taken on under the employment option. Yes, there will be the subsidy and the £750 training grant, but those people will also be taken on as ordinary employees. The expectation is that they will be taken on at the normal rate for the job.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PUBLIC PROCESSIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*, the Standing Committee on the Bill shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Meacher be added to the Environmental Audit Committee.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (SCOTLAND BILL)

Ordered,

That a Motion relating to Scotland Bill (Programme) in the names of Mr. Secretary Dewar, Mrs. Ann Taylor, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. Paul Tyler and Mrs. Margaret Ewing may be proceeded with at any hour through opposed, and, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 83 (Allocation of time to bills), the Speaker shall put any Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings thereon (including the Question on any Amendment which may have been selected and may then be moved) not later than three-quarters of an hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Freshwater (Leasehold Management)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Had I not thought that it might be considered discourteous to refer to my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction as "my grandmother", I might have been forgiven for commencing this debate by proffering an egg and two straws. No hon. Member can be unaware of the years of research and campaigning that my hon. Friend has devoted to the subject of leasehold reform. I certainly have no intention of trying to teach anyone to suck eggs, and it is with a keen awareness of my own lack of expertise in these matters that I detain the House today, on behalf of my constituents.

In January 1992, one of the 156 companies in the Freshwater group, of which Mr. Benzion Freshwater was a director—a company called St. Leonards Properties Ltd., of 158-62 Shaftesbury avenue, London—sold the head lease of the block of 30 flats known as Mountaire Court, in my constituency, to a company called Maringrove Ltd., the director of which was a man called Paul Chater.

The flats were in an extremely bad state of repair and had declined under Freshwater's ownership. Interestingly, Freshwater promptly bought back long leases on 14 of the 30 flats, some of which it has subsequently let to tenants on a rack-rent basis. Maringrove Ltd. appointed a company called Avery Management to act as managing agents of Mountaire Court—at which point things began to get interesting.

On the instructions of Maringrove, the registered office of which is at Bishop House, Guildford road, Leatherhead, Avery Management—the registered office of which just happens also to be Bishop House, Guildford road, Leatherhead—decided to embark on a programme of major structural repairs. Tenders were solicited, and Willmott Dixon Ltd. submitted the lowest bid, at £477,263. All went quiet—until another company, George Smith Group, submitted a bid that was just below Willmott Dixon's bid, at £475,000.

I have managed to contact all the other four contractors who tendered for the work. Willmott Dixon's manager certainly remembered it. He said:

"We came in the lowest, then all went quiet. It seemed like a scam. If we'd known at the beginning we wouldn't have bothered tendering for it."

I eventually traced the successful contractors, the George Smith group, in the phone book to an address at 52 Brooks mews, London. It is a building called Avery house, and it also happens to be the head office of Avery Management. Unfortunately, the telephone number that the directory gave me was unobtainable, having been disconnected on 8 December this year, just five days after I began asking questions. However, let us go back to 1992.

Avery Management invoiced all leaseholders for £22,150.86 for the repair work in advance. After that, there was a period of wrangling during which some leaseholders paid up while others, threatened with repossession, handed their keys back to the building society and walked away. Others, such as the leaseholders of the 14 Freshwater flats, paid nothing at all. However, the repair works to the block were never completed.

On 4 March 1996, Maringrove Ltd. went into liquidation and was put in the hands of the official receiver. On 14 June that year, a company of liquidators called Leonard Curtis was appointed to wind up Maringrove's affairs. Leonard Curtis then set about appointing a new managing agent, a company called Parkgate-Aspen whose employees I had the honour to meet on 3 December after the residents of Mountaire Court had approached me in desperation.

The new managing agents had demanded a further £5,500 from each of the flats in June this year to do the very work for which the leaseholders had already paid Maringrove Ltd. Their appointed surveyor, Chris Negus of Brooke, Vincent and Partners, stated at the meeting on 3 December that the first time he had tried to survey the property was in July 1997. When I challenged him as to how Parkgate-Aspen had issued a demand on 21 June, prior to the July survey, Mr. Negus said that he had given a rough estimate to Parkgate-Aspen the previous November after "walking around the outside" of the property. When I asked him to check what that estimate was, he confirmed the figure of £75,000. The demand notice issued in June by Parkgate-Aspen had been for £140,000. The cost had almost doubled before any survey was carried out. Mr. Brown from Parkgate-Aspen assured us that he knew what he was doing; he had worked for Freshwater many times before.

Questions also hang over the actions of the liquidators, Leonard Curtis of Eastbourne terrace, London. Why, for example, have they not notified the land registry, some 18 months after their appointment, that Maringrove is even in liquidation? Why have they not after 18 months contacted all Maringrove's creditors? Most important, why have they not done what liquidators do—liquidate? Why have they not liquidated Maringrove's head lease at Mountaire Court?

As an asset, a head lease is the inverse of the property itself. The more work required, the more attractive it is to buy: the more work a manager needs to do on the property, the more he can charge for the job of managing. Perversely, by trying to manage the property themselves, the liquidators are diminishing the asset that they are supposed to be liquidating.

I tried to give Leonard Curtis the opportunity to answer my questions earlier today. However, four of the partners—Mr. Monjack, Mr. Goodman, Mr. Swaden and Mr. Schapira—would not admit to being in the office at 10.15 this morning. The only other partner, Mr. Barry, who was in the office, declined to speak to me.

I hope that I have convinced the House that the important amendments that my hon. Friend the Minister introduced to the Housing Act 1996 when he was in opposition still leave leaseholders inadequately protected against unscrupulous, rapacious landlords. The tenants at Mountaire Court have been made aware of the role of leasehold valuation tribunals in resolving disputed charges. They now know that under section 81 of that Act they are protected against bully-boy tactics that threaten forfeiture, but I ask the Minister to consider the merits of some specific proposals.

First, we should impose a limit on a superior lessor or freeholder's ability to dispose of an interest without first complying with their obligations to repair and manage the

property properly. That would stop landlords running down a property and then running out on it by selling a head lease on.

Secondly, we should require that all leaseholders should be advised by head leaseholders or freeholders of the basis of their rateable contribution to any service charge or capital worth and of the rateable proportions of all other affected leaseholders.

Thirdly, if a head leaseholder goes into liquidation, the management of the property should pass to a managing agent jointly appointed by freeholder and leaseholders. They should then jointly decide whether the head lease is sold on.

Fourthly, any money required in advance of work being done should be held in a trust account, with signatures required from the leaseholders and the landlord.

Fifthly, we should move to the system of commonhold, whereby each leaseholder owns the lease to their property and they jointly hold the freehold to the land and common parts of the building.

Sixthly, the Government should give leaseholders the right to manage themselves. Let us see an end to feudalism.

During my research for the debate, I have spoken to many people whose lives have been ruined and whose life savings have been lost because of venal and greedy landlords. I pay tribute to the help that I have had in that research from the *Evening Standard*, particularly Mira Bar Hillel.

I have seen people worn down by such venal landlords, but venal and greedy people do not always appear to be so. Sometimes they wear a cloak of excessive politeness. Sometimes they appeal for our sympathy. Yesterday, I received a hand delivered letter from the Freshwater group. It politely stated:

"I know you will want to be correctly informed when you speak in the debate on Friday."

Indeed, that is true. It also said that Maringrove

" is totally unconnected with Freshwater".

I have here evidence of a very close working relationship between Maringrove and Freshwater which long predates the purchase of the head lease in 1992. Not only was that relationship close and in existence, but it involved other properties in different parts of the country.

Finally and pathetically, the letter states:

"Freshwater is in the same unfortunate position as the other long lessees."

What I have in my possession—and what the other long lessees do not have—is a companies form 395. The name of the company on it is Maringrove Ltd. and the form registers a first charge against that company for £15,938.38 plus interest accruing. The charge was created on 5 June 1992. It gives the presenter a prior claim on a liquidation fund arising from the winding-up of Maringrove Ltd. It is signed:

"P. M. Crystal. Freshwaters Legal Department."

2.45 pm

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) for raising these important and troubling matters on the Adjournment. He has highlighted a matter of very real concern that affects his constituents. He has clearly been assiduous in his research and in his work on behalf of his constituents, uncovering what can only be described as a veritable can of worms.

My hon. Friend has highlighted a distressing series of events that have left his constituents feeling shabbily treated. They are, I fear, all too typical of the problems faced by many residential leaseholders in recent years. Many landlords, of course, are good managers, but there is an all too significant minority whose management styles range from the incompetent to the criminal, the result of which is all the attendant misery the leaseholders have to endure.

Some landlords are absent or neglectful, so essential work remains undone; others are lazy and keep on contractors or agents for year after year without testing the market, with the result that the leaseholders, who pay for the services, do not get value for money. The more unscrupulous charge for work that has not been done, or undertake works that are unnecessary, or to too high a specification, or to too low a standard, with the result that leaseholders pay a high price for work they do not need and which may then have to be expensively remedied. Then there are the out-and-out criminals who misappropriate the service charge and sinking funds. That is not an exhaustive list of the sufferings of leaseholders, but I believe that it will give the House a flavour of what we are dealing with.

I shall answer my hon. Friend by expanding on the points in the letter that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing wrote to him on 3 December in response to initial representations that he was rightly making to our Department at that time. I must stress that I cannot comment on the merits of any party's actions in the case, especially as litigation may be pending. I must also not attempt to interpret the statutes; that function is reserved to the courts. What I can do is set out the main provisions of the law relating to leasehold management. That will, I hope, shed some light on leaseholders' rights and how they may be exercised.

What happens to service charge contributions when leaseholders pay them over to their landlord or managing agent—a point my hon. Friend highlighted in the series of questions at the end of his speech? Section 42 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 provides that service charge moneys should be held on trust, with any interest accruing, for the purposes for which they have been paid and, subject to that, for the benefit of the leaseholders. That is automatic and does not require a special trust deed to be signed. If the landlord or managing agent to whom the service charges have been paid goes into liquidation, the service charge moneys are protected by the trust from the other creditors. If the money has not been spent on the works for which it was paid and the liquidators cannot find it, it is possible that a criminal offence, such as fraud or theft, has been committed. If that is suspected, the police should be asked to investigate.

Where leaseholders are in dispute with their landlords over service charges, they can seek a determination of the reasonableness of those service charges from their local leasehold valuation tribunal. My hon. Friend referred to the new rights that can be exercised through leasehold valuation tribunals as a result of changes under the Housing Act 1996.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

As well as challenging bills for work already done, or purported to have been done, leaseholders can challenge the scope, extent and cost of proposed works. That jurisdiction has been available since 1 September 1997. Leaseholders can also apply to the leasehold valuation tribunal for the appointment of a new manager if the management of the block is thought to be unsatisfactory.

The grounds for the appointment of a new manager include a track record of excessive service charges and failure to abide by an approved code of management practice. The relevant code for most leasehold blocks would be the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors service charge residential management code, which is available from the institution at a modest cost.

Leasehold valuation tribunals charge fees of up to £500 per case, but do not award costs. Landlords may seek to include their costs in their next service charge demand if the leases permit this, but leaseholders can prevent that by obtaining an order under section 20C of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. A section 20C order can be made by any tribunal or court which hears service charge disputes and leaseholders can apply at the hearing or subsequently. That provides one remedy to another problem that my hon. Friend rightly highlighted.

Leaseholders may well feel that they have to obtain some evidence in addition to their own correspondence before taking any action. As well as the information on service charge accounts that they are entitled to under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, they may wish to undertake a management audit of their landlord's service charge operations, or appoint a surveyor who can advise them on the condition of their building and the need for any works.

A management audit, under chapter V of part I of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, can be required by a two-thirds majority of the service charge paying leaseholders in a block. On the surface, it would appear that this option may not be available to the leaseholders of Mountaire Court because 14 of the 30 flats are leased by Freshwater. However, I understand from the correspondence to which my hon. Friend referred—I also received a copy—that Freshwater, as lessee, identifies itself as being in the same unfortunate position as the other residents who are being asked to pay the sums described by my hon. Friend. The remedies granted by statute are available to Freshwater, just as they are to the resident lessees. Therefore, Freshwater might consider that a management audit would be appropriate. The auditors, who must be qualified accountants or surveyors, have the right to inspect the relevant documents and premises in order to carry out their functions.

Under section 84 of the Housing Act 1996, a recognised tenants association also has the right to appoint a surveyor, who can inspect the common parts of the block and any documents which it is reasonable for him to see. A tenants association can be recognised by the landlord or, if he will not do so, by a member of the local rent assessment committee. The committee is the same organisation as the leasehold valuation tribunal, but constituted for different purposes. The committee would normally expect a tenants association to have at least 60 per cent. support before recognising it.

The threat of forfeiture of a lease has now been decoupled from service charge disputes. Since 24 September 1996, landlords have been unable to forfeit a residential lease for non-payment of a service charge unless and until that charge has been agreed or admitted by the leaseholder, or the reasonableness of the charge has been determined by a court or arbitral tribunal. I should emphasise here that a leasehold valuation tribunal is not an arbitral tribunal. That means that its decisions must be confirmed by a court before they can be enforced.

Therefore, if a landlord wants to enforce the payment of a service charge, he may apply to the leasehold valuation tribunal for a determination and then seek to enforce it in court if the leaseholders do not pay. Alternatively, he may go to court to enforce the payment of the alleged debt. The court would then be likely to remit the question of the reasonableness of the service charge to the leasehold valuation tribunal, whose decision would then be fed back into the court process. If any party is dissatisfied with the leasehold valuation tribunal's decision, they can, by leave, appeal to the Lands Tribunal. In contrast to leasehold valuation tribunals, the Lands Tribunal can award costs.

In due course, I would expect the liquidators in this case to sell the head lease. When they do, the right of first refusal, under part I of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, will probably come into play. The Act provides that landlords selling an interest in a block of flats which is immediately superior to those of the occupying leaseholders must first offer it to them.

From my hon. Friend's comments, it would appear that, when Freshwater sold the head lease in 1992, it did not offer the right of first refusal to the other leaseholders as it should have done in order to ensure compliance with the 1987 Act. There was no criminal sanction at that stage, but consequent to changes made under the 1996 Act, the landlord selling without offering his interest to the qualifying tenants would be guilty of a criminal offence.

As well as offering his interest directly, a landlord may use the auction route. That enables him to obtain the open market value for the asset, but allows the leaseholders to take the contract from the successful bidder at the auction. I understand that some property auctioneers can provide a comprehensive service, which includes serving the necessary notices on the residents.

Before leaseholders embark on the exercise of their rights, it is essential that they obtain as much information as possible, followed by sound professional advice. My Department publishes a range of free booklets that set out leaseholders' rights. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing sent my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North copies of the relevant ones with her letter of 3 December. My Department also funds, with the private sector, the independent leasehold advisory service known as LEASE. LEASE offers free initial advice to leaseholders and freeholders on residential landlord and tenant matters, including service charge issues and the right of first refusal.

Finally, there is the question of what the Government are going to do next in the complex area of leasehold law. I have not touched on leasehold enfranchisement on this occasion, as it is not immediately relevant to the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North, but he will be aware that we are committed to streamlining and simplifying procedures to make it easier for leaseholders to exercise their right to enfranchise.

I hope that I have been able to assure my hon. Friend that a wide range of safeguards and remedies are already available to residential leaseholders, although some of them are virtually untried at present. However, the Government are not satisfied with the state of leasehold law, which has been patched up over the years as problems have emerged. New holes in the fabric come to light all the time, and examples similar to those to which my hon. Friend has alluded are all too common.

The Government believe that it is time for effective and far-reaching reforms of the whole system. We have a commitment to bring forward a new package of reforms to assist leaseholders and we are doing some hard thinking about the detailed implications. My hon. Friend will recognise that the area is extremely complex and that it is necessary to think through very carefully all the implications before proposing a package of reforms. That is what we are doing at the moment; we shall probably make an announcement about our proposals and invite comments from interested parties in the spring.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 22 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Press (Privacy Legislation)

1. **Mr. Ottaway:** What plans he has to introduce privacy legislation applying to the press. [20156]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): We have no plans for general legislation on privacy. The data protection Bill will be concerned only with the privacy of personal information. The Human Rights Bill, which is before another place, simply incorporates into British domestic law obligations under the European convention on human rights to which this country has been subject continuously since the convention was ratified by the United Kingdom in 1951.

Mr. Ottaway: Given that the Lord Chancellor has made it clear that the Press Complaints Commission is a public authority and will therefore be bound to apply the principles of the European convention on human rights, does the right hon. Gentleman think that the PCC has worked so far, that it will work under its new code; and, if not, would it not be better to have a statutory right of privacy rather than leaving it to judge-made law that applies the principles of the convention?

Mr. Straw: We do not accept that there is a case for general legislation on privacy. Whether the judges develop what the hon. Gentleman describes as judge-made law on privacy is a matter for them and it would arise whether or not the European convention were incorporated and whether that particular form of incorporation were accepted. I know that the hon. Gentleman supports incorporation because he voted for a Bill in favour of incorporation that came before the House in 1987. As to the code, our guess—it can only be a guess—is that, in adjudicating between breaches of articles 8 and 10 of the convention, the courts will properly be bound to take into account the extent to which newspapers have complied with the Press Complaints Commission code.

Mr. Skinner: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he is correct in his stance of not introducing legislation on privacy? Throughout my time as a Member of Parliament, I have never had a letter from a constituent asking us to bring in a law to protect the great and the good—and, by and large, that is what it is all about. We hear the aristocracy and one or two other groups—and the Tories, from time to time—squealing and saying, "Protect us." I do not believe that we should and I hope that my right hon. Friend will continue with that stance even if some interfering busybodies in the common market want him to change his mind.

Mr. Straw: As to the latter group of people, it is worth pointing out that the data protection Bill has to be brought before the House only because of the data protection directive, which the previous Administration allowed to go through and which binds the United Kingdom Government and Parliament to introduce legislation in accordance with that directive by the middle of next year.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: A few months ago, the Home Secretary was given legal advice by the Lord Chancellor as to the possibility of judicially driven privacy law emerging from the incorporation of the ECHR into British law. More recently, the right hon. Gentleman was given exactly the opposite advice from the Lord Chancellor. I wonder which he thinks is right and preferable.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman knows enough about the workings of government to know that the Law Officers give legal advice, not the Lord Chancellor. His position is exactly as I expressed it at the press conference on the publication of the Human Rights Bill—that, while that is ultimately a matter for the courts and not for us, there is every indication that, if the Bill on incorporation is enacted as drafted, the Press Complaints Commission will be regarded under clause 6 of that Bill as a public authority for its purposes.

Voluntary Sector

2. **Mr. Laxton:** How many meetings he has had since 1 May with members of voluntary organisations to discuss the voluntary sector. [20157]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): Since 1 May, when responsibility for the voluntary sector and for volunteering was returned to the Home Office, there have been more than 100 meetings with members of voluntary organisations involving myself or my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. We have also assisted Ministers in other Departments, notably the Department for Education and Employment, which has various initiatives, with wide-ranging consultation on policies that have a direct impact on the work of voluntary organisations.

Mr. Laxton: In my constituency there are many long-standing, vibrant and well-organised voluntary organisations. In the north of my constituency is a recently charter-marked sub-post office, where David and Mary Peters are developing a contribution to some embryo organisations and voluntary groups. If I may, Madam Speaker, I will pass on to you a woollen stocking that they asked me to present to you, in appreciation of an afternoon that they spent in the Strangers Gallery on the day when their charter mark was awarded; I have it here, and I think that it will fit very nicely on your mantelpiece.

Does my right hon. Friend think, like David, Mary and myself, that the move to the Home Office of responsibility for voluntary organisations is welcome, has already been successful and gives a far higher profile to voluntary organisations? Does he agree that the more co-ordinated approach has proved a success?

Mr. Michael: I take it that there is only one stocking, because it is meant to be filled by Father Christmas for you, Madam Speaker, rather than by your legs. I had better leave the subject at that point.

I agree whole-heartedly with my hon. Friend. The move to the Home Office of responsibility for the voluntary sector and volunteering gives my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, as the holder of one of the four great offices of state, the opportunity to put his weight behind our work in nurturing and working in partnership with the voluntary sector. We place a high priority on that, and I certainly welcome the opportunity to be involved in the work of that sector.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I welcome the continuing partnership with the voluntary organisations. Some of the meetings will have involved the flow of funds from the national lottery; is it lawful now for any of the money to be diverted from the five main streams in the National Lottery etc. Act 1993?

Mr. Michael: It is not for me to comment on lottery policies, which are dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, but I know that many voluntary organisations receive money from the National Lottery Charities Board as well as from the other lottery streams. It is clearly good for the work of the sector to be nurtured in that way, and I know that my right hon. Friend is considering how to improve and increase the impact in a variety of ways.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While the Minister is talking about the role of the National Lottery Charities Board, will he bear in mind that many charities have been affected by the lottery and that there is at the same time a threat to charity shops in the tax proposals? Will he use his influence with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that those who volunteer are not endangered?

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has a great interest in the voluntary sector, as was demonstrated by the speech that he gave a couple of years ago to the Charities Aid Foundation. I am certain that he will listen to the representations that are made to him on this matter, as on so many others.

Mrs. Brinton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the voluntary sector has a key role to play in rebuilding society, especially in welfare to work and in my constituency of Peterborough? Does he agree that our programmes prove that the Government, unlike the previous Administration, want an effective partnership with the voluntary sector?

Mr. Michael: I agree with my hon. Friend: there is no doubt about the wish to build that partnership. I am aware, from the meeting that I attended in her constituency some time ago, of the healthy and vibrant nature of the voluntary sector there. The voluntary sector will make a significant contribution to the new deal, which will give opportunities to young people both in the voluntary sector option and in the environmental task force, in which so many voluntary organisations will also be involved. That will give young people an opportunity and at the same time make a contribution to the community.

Licensing Hours

3. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** If he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government on licensing hours for public houses and clubs. [20158]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I have received representations from consumer, police and industry interests, many of which support longer opening hours but I have not yet reached any firm conclusions. If we went down that path, we would want to resolve the difficulty of balancing the desire of consumers with the desire of neighbourhoods for peace after establishments close. I shall risk telling the hon. Gentleman that one example often quoted is opening hours in other European states. As I am trying to win his favour at this time of goodwill, I will not press that point too far.

Sir Teddy Taylor: When will the Government make a decision on the 1996 White Paper? Is the Minister aware of the huge public concern about further extension of hours? Bearing in mind that the crime figures show clearly that alcohol is a basic element in a great deal of violent crime, will not the Government give more time and attention to exposing the dangers of alcohol rather than to extending licensing hours when clubs are already open until 2 am and sometimes 3 am?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The previous Government held an extensive consultation exercise on licensing hours. To their surprise, and that of the industry, there was considerable concern about the issues that he raised, which we take seriously. That is why we are not rushing headlong into any reform along the lines that have been suggested, although I still would not want to rule that out. Genuine issues, many of which he raised, need to be covered.

Mr. Cawsey: I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister. In any review of licensing hours, will he take into account the night club industry? I say straight away that I have no personal interest in the industry. Those days are long gone. *[Interruption.]* Sad isn't it? Perhaps not at Christmas, but as a rule. The previous Government's review of licensing hours created no new trade; it merely moved it from night clubs to public houses. Will the Minister consult all appropriate interest groups in the industry so that he can reach a balanced judgment?

Mr. Howarth: Of course all the interest groups would be consulted on any proposals that we may make, though at present we have none. My hon. Friend is right that there is concern about the clubs industry. That is why police in many towns have argued in favour of staggering closing hours. I am not sure whether that is the answer. When I say "staggered", I mean it in the sense of time, not of people leaving such establishments.

Mr. Brooke: Does the Minister accept that, whatever the merits of the 24-hour city elsewhere, unless the

advance of tourism, leisure and entertainment in the swathe of central London between Covent Garden and Bayswater is tempered, the continuity of its residential communities, which confers so much stability on the heart of the capital, will be threatened?

Mr. Howarth: While I know less than the right hon. Gentleman, I am aware of the concerns of the part of London that he represents. That is why I said earlier that it is important to balance the consumers' desire to drink at different hours with the rights of neighbourhoods to peace and quiet after a reasonable time at night. That is difficult to get right, but, if there are to be reforms, such issues have to be tackled in a way that would satisfy the right hon. Gentleman, his constituents and, indeed, mine.

Crime

4. **Maria Eagle:** If he will make a statement on the proportion of reported crimes which resulted in conviction in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1996. [20159]

Mr. Michael: It is not possible to give the information in precisely the form requested. I have looked at the figures carefully, however, and the facts are startling. In 1980, one offender was convicted of indictable offences for every six crimes recorded by the police. By 1996, that rate had deteriorated from one in six to one in 17.

Maria Eagle: I thank the Minister for that reply, which seems to confirm how much worse clear-up rates became under the previous Conservative Administration. What reassurance can he give to the residents of Dymchurch estate in Speke who suffer from the behaviour of young children and youths wandering the streets with hammers and pickaxes, causing nuisance, vandalism, who are gradually demolishing that estate? What reassurance can my hon. Friend give my constituents that things will improve under this Administration?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is right to say that things got progressively worse under the previous Administration. That deterioration was brought to light in a paper published by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary before the election. What we offer to overcome those problems is the contents of the Crime and Disorder Bill—the way in which we intend to speed up youth justice; action to nip things in the bud with young offenders; the move from repeat cautioning to the final warning system; and the introduction of sentences that will work as a deterrent.

In addition, the partnership approach will involve the police and local authorities in identifying problems such as those on estates such as Dymchurch. We will make sure that they take action to prevent problems from developing and to cut the existing crime rate.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Of more relevance, would the Minister confirm that the number of offences cleared up last year rose by 1 per cent. compared with the clear-up rate in 1995? Without any sense of complacency, would he not say that that represents a significant improvement given that the number of recorded crimes has dropped by 10 per cent. in the past four years?

Mr. Michael: Of course, that increase was from a low base and after a massive deterioration, as illustrated by the figures that I gave earlier. The hon. Gentleman is being extremely complacent about the performance of his Government.

Dr. Iddon: Last Saturday night in my constituency, a young taxi driver, Quadir Hussain, aged 32, was involved in an incident with four passengers in his cab. As a result, he was so frightened that he fled and was pursued by one of those passengers across the extremely busy dual carriageway, the A666, where he was hit by an oncoming car and killed. This afternoon the drivers of private hire cars in Bolton are meeting to discuss the ever-rising number of incidents involving them. Will my hon. Friend please note that incident, and join the rest of the House in sending Mrs. Hussain and the rest of the Hussain family our sincerest condolences?

Mr. Michael: I certainly join my hon. Friend in expressing condolence. Any such event is absolutely horrific. We need to learn lessons from any such occasion, which can be done only when we know the full facts of the actual incident. My hon. Friend is right to remind us that individual events are not just statistics but involve human beings whose lives are often ruined as a result, as are the lives of their loved ones.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: One statistic of the past 10 years that will cause concern to both sides of the House is the reduction of 24 per cent. in the conviction rate for rape, while the number of rapes recorded has increased threefold. The Home Secretary has said that he will legislate to stop intimidatory cross-examination of rape victims by those who are accused of raping them. In the past few days, however, the Lord Chancellor has warned of the serious difficulty in doing that, because of the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into British law. As in other subjects, which Cabinet Minister should we believe?

Mr. Michael: If there are problems with the ECHR, they would exist whether or not it was incorporated into our law, because we are signed up to that convention. The point is that there are serious difficulties in relation to the number of successful prosecutions for rape and increasing people's confidence in the system. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has established a working party of officials, which will report early in the new year on a range of matters, including ways to enable people to be certain that they will be protected and can give their evidence in a proper manner. We hope that that will make a great impact on the confidence felt by victims about how the system operates.

Metropolitan Police (Corruption)

5. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** What steps he is taking to eliminate corruption in the Metropolitan police. [20160]

Mr. Straw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is determined to root out corruption in the Metropolitan police. He has my full support in doing so. He has set out his strategy for tackling corruption in the "London Beat", his five-year strategic plan. He informs me that, as for all criminal offences, he is using proactive methods and intelligence to target suspects. I

await with interest the report and recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee in respect of the police complaints and discipline system more generally.

Mr. Prentice: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply, which many people will find reassuring, especially after the astonishing news at the weekend that the police threw road blocks around the headquarters of the flying squad at Walthamstow. Will my right hon. Friend tell me again whether the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolitan will have all the resources necessary to root out corruption? More importantly, will he answer this simple question: why is corruption allowed to take root in the Metropolitan police? Why was there not a system in place to prevent that sort of thing happening?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He asks whether the Commissioner will ensure that all the resources necessary are available to the Metropolitan Police Complaints Investigation Bureau; that is the case, and the number of officers assigned to that bureau has recently been increased. I do not accept the implication of my hon. Friend's specific final question, that corruption is widespread in the Metropolitan police. The extent to which it occurs is a matter of profound concern; there should be no corruption in any police force. But no police officer should be in any doubt about the resolve of both the Commissioner and myself to ensure that any corruption is rooted out vigorously and firmly.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Preliminarily, does the Home Secretary accept that my colleagues and I wish him and his colleagues, you, Madam Speaker, and all hon. Members a happy Christmas? Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that I share his strong view on the unacceptability of corruption in the Metropolitan police or any other police force? Does the Home Secretary believe that the dismissing of officers from that force is a sufficient response to prima facie corrupt behaviour? Will he ensure that the Commissioner has all the legal powers he needs to deal ruthlessly with corrupt behaviour?

Mr. Straw: I return the right hon. Gentleman's slightly ambiguous compliment in a wholly unambiguous way. Labour Members wish the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends a happy Christmas and a good new year, particularly in their Front-Bench positions—long may their positions continue.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked whether I believed that the power to dismiss police officers was sufficient. It is necessary in respect of corrupt police officers; it may not be sufficient. I note fully what he says about the need for the Commissioner and other chief constables to have the full range of legal powers available to them. The implication of the right hon. Gentleman's question was that he believed that the current powers were not particularly satisfactory. I await with great interest the report of the Home Affairs Select Committee on complaints and discipline in the police, on the basis of which I shall make recommendations to the House and the other place.

Mr. Mullin: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, as long ago as 1993, his predecessor had plans for a radical shake-up of disciplinary procedures in the police, which would have greatly assisted the Commissioner in dealing with the most recent allegations of corruption, but that for some reason that shake-up did not occur? Can he think of any reason why the shake-up was not proceeded with? Will he assure the House that he will not give way to any of the mighty vested interests that might be pressing him to do little or nothing about the problems?

Mr. Straw: I know the reason that the shake-up was not proceeded with. The proposals were made in a speech to the Police Superintendents Association in 1993 by my predecessor but one, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). They were abandoned when my immediate predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), became Home Secretary. As I said to the right hon. Member for North–West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), we await the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) chairs with such distinction. I repeat our determination, which is shared by all hon. Members on both sides of the House, to ensure that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and other chief constables have the full range of powers effectively and ruthlessly to root out corruption inside the police service.

Repeat Offenders

6. **Mr. Loughton:** What plans he has to make special sentencing powers available to courts for repeat offenders. [20162]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Ms Joyce Quin): We have already implemented the provisions in the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 under which offenders convicted for the second time of a serious violent or sexual offence will receive an automatic life sentence; and those convicted for a third time of dealing in hard drugs will receive a mandatory minimum sentence of seven years imprisonment.

The Government's Crime and Disorder Bill, which is currently before Parliament, provides for a statutory duty on the Court of Appeal to consider providing sentencing guidelines for all the main offences, which would ensure greater consistency in sentencing.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful for that answer, but, having accepted the principle of extending prison stays for serious sexual and violent offenders as laid down by the previous Home Secretary, what do the Government have against the principle of minimum sentences for repeat or career burglars? Is taking tough action against that serious area of crime not a priority for the Government in the lifetime of this Parliament?

Ms Quin: As I made clear at the last Home Department questions, we are not against that principle. This would appear to be a severe case of repeat questioning—*[Interruption.]* That question has already been answered effectively by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and other colleagues on several occasions. There is no difference between our view and that of the previous Government in this respect; but it was clear in the measures adopted by the previous Government that they

had neither the resources nor an immediate timetable for implementing the measures to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Angela Smith: A recent incident in my constituency involving a sex offender has brought home strongly the importance of ensuring public confidence in the sentencing of sex offenders. What plans does my hon. Friend have to ensure that, following release, serious sex offenders and violent offenders are properly supervised?

Ms Quin: I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that the Crime and Disorder Bill will contain provisions for extending supervision of sexual and violent offenders, which will respond to the point she has raised.

Drug Rehabilitation Establishments

7. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** If he will list the drug rehabilitation establishments which the Under Secretary with responsibility has visited since 1 May. [20163]

Mr. George Howarth: I have made visits to look at drug prevention programmes, rehabilitation programmes and various forms of treatment, both in the community and within the criminal justice system. In that context, I have visited Prison Service establishments with drug treatment programmes at Lindholme, Moorland, Lancaster, Channings Wood, Wetherby and Liverpool; probation initiatives in Plymouth, Bristol and Merseyside; several drug prevention initiative supported projects in Derby, West Yorkshire, Tower Hamlets and East Sussex; a voluntary initiative run by Cranstoun Drug Services in Wimbledon; and an arrest referral scheme in Oxford. As a result, I believe that there are many useful ways of reducing the demand for drugs and, at the same time, using the criminal justice system creatively to break the link between crime and drugs.

Mr. Chapman: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that response. Does he agree that there is a clear correlation between drug misuse and crime and that one way of tackling that is through the treatment of offenders? Does he also agree that the provisions in the Crime and Disorder Bill and the appointment of an anti-drugs co-ordinator show how serious is the intent of the Government to tackle the issue?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is right, in that there is a growing body of evidence of a strong link between drugs and crime. On Friday last week, I was talking to a couple of people who were receiving treatment while on bail as part of probation arrangements that offer an opportunity to deal with such people. We have made a start by appointing the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator, Keith Hellawell, and his deputy Mike Trace; and there are provisions, particularly for treatment and testing orders, in the Crime and Disorder Bill. We are determined to use every possible opportunity within the criminal justice system to tackle the growing problem in a creative and helpful way.

Mr. Evans: Will the Minister send his condolences to the families of those who have lost loved ones in 1997, because of the menace of drugs? Will he send his thanks to those who painstakingly work with drug addicts to rehabilitate them? Finally, will he condemn *The Independent on Sunday* for its irresponsible campaign to decriminalise cannabis in this country? It is a gateway drug, whose use might lead to people moving on to far harder drugs—although the message should be communicated that cannabis itself is a serious drug and extremely damaging to those who take it.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is right. Obviously, I would join him in sending condolences to all the families that have lost relatives as a result of drug misuse—and I would also send condolences to the families that have been wrecked by the things that occur when people become involved in drugs. Of course, we join the hon. Gentleman in sending our best wishes to those who do the difficult job of working with drug misusers, voluntarily or through the criminal justice system.

The obsession of *The Independent on Sunday* with the subject of decriminalising cannabis is irresponsible. I am sad to say that it reflects a concern on the part of the chattering classes, which is often an apology for their own use rather than their having anything constructive to say about current drugs policy.

Corruption

8. **Mr. Wyatt:** If he will make a statement on the Government's plans to create a new, single offence of corruption. [20164]

Mr. Straw: On 9 June, I published a consultative paper on the reform of the law on corruption. A copy is available in the Library.

I shall carefully consider the responses to that paper, to the Law Commission paper on corruption offences and any further recommendations that the Committee on Standards in Public Life may make in relation to the criminal law. I expect to make a further statement on the reform of the law in this area early next year.

Mr. Wyatt: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. When he is considering future changes, will he contemplate holding those data centrally, to facilitate changes in the forthcoming information Act?

Mr. Straw: I see no reason why much of the available information on corruption should not be held centrally. Sometimes information cannot be held centrally because of disproportionate cost, but we shall do our best to comply with my hon. Friend's request.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the Home Secretary agree that the offence of corruption of a Member of Parliament is serious, so the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1906 and 1916 should be amended to include the offence of attempted corruption of a Member of Parliament or any elected representative?

Mr. Straw: There are very strong grounds for proceeding as the hon. Gentleman proposes. I am currently considering responses to the consultative paper that I published earlier in the year; when I have done so, I shall make proposals to the House, and it will be a matter for the House to decide.

Mr. Dismore: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his proposals for a new offence will take into account the

type of corruption that was exposed in the High Court on Friday, when Dame Shirley Porter and others were found guilty of wilful misconduct, which cost £27 million? Will he also join me and the other Labour former Westminster councillors in the House in condemning the Conservative party, which has not said a word against Dame Shirley Porter, although one of those found guilty continues to serve as a Westminster councillor?

Does my right hon. Friend agree with me and the *Evening Standard* editorial on Friday that Dame Shirley Porter should be stripped of her dameship? In view of the finding of the High Court that Dame Shirley Porter lied to the court, will he refer the matter to the Metropolitan police for investigation as to whether she committed perjury?

Mr. Straw: I not only congratulate but thank my hon. Friend and many other hon. Friends—some now in the House, some now outside—for the courageous 12-year campaign that they waged to expose that corruption. I also say to the Conservative party through you, Madam Speaker, that for years we were told by the Conservative party that it would condemn Lady Porter's behaviour if and when a court found against that behaviour. On Friday 19 December, a three-judge court, led by the distinguished Lord Justice Rose, found against Lady Porter, declared her to be a liar and confirmed the district auditor's conclusions that she had sought to spend public money gerrymandering a large part of Westminster. I now look forward to the right hon. Member for North–West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) unequivocally condemning that behaviour at the Dispatch Box.

Police Officers

9. **Mr. Allan:** What was the total number of police officers in England and Wales in *(a)* April 1992, *(b)* March 1997 and *(c)* September 1997. [20165]

Mr. Michael: There were 127,760 police officers in April 1992. By March 1997, the number had fallen to 127,158; by September, it had fallen again to 126,798. That is a fall of 962 over a five-year period.

Mr. Allan: I note that the Labour party was crafty enough not to give any specific figures for police numbers in its election manifesto, although it spent plenty of time attacking the Conservative Government for the falls that they had brought about.

Is not the Minister concerned about the fact that the Association of Police Authorities believes that his increased settlements for next year will be all but swallowed up in increased salary and pension costs for existing staff? That view is shared by my authority, South Yorkshire, which predicts staff cuts in the face of a 3.8 per cent. increase. Is not the Minister concerned about the fact that that means that next year's settlement will do nothing to reverse the trend of falling numbers?

Mr. Michael: First, ours was an honest response. At the time of the 1992 election, the Conservative party promised an increase of 1,000 in 12 months, but it did not increase the number of police officers by 1,000; it cut the number by 1,000 over five years. Secondly, we did not give figures relating to the number of police officers because, in the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994, the Conservative party removed that responsibility from Government, and made it the responsibility of chief constables to decide how many police officers they should employ within the available resources.

In the coming year, police officers in England and Wales will receive an increase in spending power of £258 million. That takes the figure up to £7.15 billion, and represents a 3.7 per cent. increase on the current year. I think that it is a pretty good settlement in the circumstances.

Ms Beverley Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fall in the number of police officers contrasts starkly with the previous Government's promise to provide thousands of extra officers? Does he further agree that this year's settlement allows police authorities to take some steps towards redressing the imbalance? Is he aware that the absence of police officers on the streets in many parts of the country—including my constituency, where, on estates such as Partington, people are struggling to deal with the consequences of crime—leaves people feeling entirely unprotected?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is right. The party opposite—I mean the Conservative party: I should be as precise as the Liberal Democrats would wish me to be—promised to increase police numbers in 1992, failed to do so, and then increased its promise, with no intention of delivering, in the run-up to the election.

The increase in numbers gives chief constables and police authorities resources to increase the amount of work that they do, both directly and with partners such as local authorities, in attempting to cut crime. That is our aspiration—not to put up with the increased crime that we have seen in recent years, but to see a reduction in crime and an increase in the safety of people in their homes and on the streets year on year.

Mr. Greenway: Contrary to what the Minister has just said, chief constables throughout the country—from Wales to Cumbria and the south of England—are already saying, locally and to the press, that they will be forced to employ fewer officers over the next year as a result of the police financial settlement. That is in spite of an increase in the contribution from council tax payers. How many chief constables have suggested to the Minister that a cut in manpower is likely?

There is a common thread: the rural areas are worst affected. Is not this just another example of the Government's blatant disregard for rural interests?

Mr. Michael: That is a pretty desperate attempt by the hon. Gentleman. He asked me specifically how many police constables said that they were about to cut police numbers in the coming year. The answer is none.

Asylum Seekers

10. **Mr. Green:** What representations he has received on problems relating to Czech and Slovak asylum seekers in Kent. [20166]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): There have been numerous representations from various interested parties since the Czech and Slovak asylum seekers began to come in June this year. The major influx has now abated, and we are now concentrating our efforts on resolving the remaining cases. That is made slower and more difficult by the complex asylum system that we inherited from the Conservative Government.

Mr. Green: I thank the Minister for that reply. Will he give the House his latest assessment of the cost of the influx of so-called asylum seekers? Has any progress been made in the fair allocation of that cost? By any standards, this is a national not a local problem, and for the cost to fall exclusively on my constituents and other council tax payers in Kent is manifestly unfair.

Mr. O'Brien: The cost is on-going, but local authorities receive from the Government £140 a week per adult asylum seeker. The council tax payers of Kent contribute, but they will also contribute as income tax payers should there be any further Government money. Last April, the Conservative Government cut the amount available from the Government to Kent and other authorities by some £20 a week per adult asylum seeker. This Government have been more generous to Kent. I have agreed to look at the further help that could be given to Kent by releasing some of its section 11 funding. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in praising many of the people of Kent for their tolerance and assistance in coping with what is, for a small town such as Dover, quite a large influx of people.

Mr. Prosser: Is my hon. Friend aware that the prompt action that the Government took in reapplying immigration law had a significant effect in reducing the number of asylum seekers coming through the port of Dover, particularly into my constituency? Is he further aware that that action considerably calmed the situation and has removed what could have been an inflammatory problem? Will he contrast the Government's prompt, sensible and rational action with some of the unhelpful suggestions by some Conservative Members—not the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), I hasten to add—that thousands of asylum seekers and refugees were queuing up to flood into the port of Dover?

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his responsible and statesmanlike approach to a difficult problem for the people of Dover—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may jeer, but they do not understand the seriousness of the problem in Dover, and a number of them have not been terribly helpful in seeking to resolve it. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser), who represents his constituency so ably, has dealt with the problem calmly and sensibly, and has worked with the people of Dover and with Kent council to try to cope with the problem. We are grateful to him.

For example, from 2 November until the end of that month, five asylum seekers tried to enter this country from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Government's prompt action managed to abate that influx and dealt effectively with the problems that it was causing.

Identity Cards

11. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** What proposals he has for a national identity card scheme. [20167]

Mr. George Howarth: We are considering the options, but have no proposals yet to introduce a national identity scheme for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I ask a simple question: what does the Minister think are the benefits of a national identity scheme?

Mr. Howarth: There is a considerable lobby in favour of a national identity scheme. For example, the police believe that it would assist them in the pursuit of criminals; some believe that it would assist security in the financial sector; and others believe that it would help the retail industry to identify people. Equally, less positive arguments would have to be taken into account before a final decision was made.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The Minister will know that a photo ID card is coming through for driving licences. All the requirements for a driving licence, which virtually all of us carry, are the same as for an ID card, as long as it has a photograph or some other form of positive identification. Will he please give urgent consideration to introducing an ID card?

Mr. Howarth: It may have escaped the hon. Gentleman's attention that on 18 December my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions made an announcement on photo-identity driving licences. They have no other use, nor is any other purpose intended. If, for example, traders chose to use them as proof of identity or to establish that someone was over the age of 17, that would be a useful extension, but it would be voluntary; it would not be the Government's intention.

Mr. Winnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a lobby equally opposed to the introduction of a national identity card scheme, and that those of us who are opposed will have to be persuaded that there is a genuine need for ID cards in a democracy in peacetime? One associates a national identity card scheme more with totalitarian societies. I hope that my hon. Friend will see to it that the Government do not introduce such a card scheme. It is not necessary and would be deeply resented by many people.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend expresses a point of view that is held by many people, and for which there are precedents, but equally strong and perhaps more important views might have to be taken into account. My hon. Friend's views must be balanced against persuasive arguments in the opposite direction.

Police Settlement

12. **Mr. Hawkins:** What representations he has received on the level of the police settlement for 1998. [20168]

Mr. Straw: Four.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank the Home Secretary for his answer. Does he recognise, despite the carping comments

of the Minister of State, that the facts are that in 1996 there were about 16,000 more police officers than in 1979, and about 18,400 more civilians helping them? The Conservative party had a proud record of increasing policing where police were needed. In addition to assisting my area, will the Home Secretary ensure that areas such as South Yorkshire have enough police officers in future to investigate the on-going corruption in Labour local government—for example, in Doncaster?

Mr. Straw: The fact that this time last year 43 representations were made against the police settlement, whereas this year there were only four, suggests that there is widespread confidence in the settlement, and widespread recognition that it was fair to the police and the communities that they serve, especially against the background of an extremely difficult public spending settlement, for which the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends were principally responsible.

Crime (Sussex)

13. **Mr. Baker:** If he will meet the chief constable of the Sussex police force to discuss levels of crime. [20169]

Mr. Michael: I am always willing to discuss such matters with chief officers, and I do so regularly. I have met the chief constable of Sussex on a number of occasions, both in his role as chief constable and as a representative of the Association of Chief Police Officers. I have met him in the police force area—I recently visited Brighton police station—and I also met him in November at the Home Office.

Mr. Baker: Is the Minister aware that in my constituency there is an epidemic of vandalism? Although there is a drop in the number of other, more serious crimes, all four major towns—Seaford, Polegate, Newhaven and Lewes—are affected by vandalism, which is causing an undue fear of crime among the population at large. What steps will the Minister take to deal with the epidemic of vandalism, as a result of which the windows of one chemist shop in Seaford were smashed seven times in a number of weeks? I saw the chemist on Saturday. Will the Minister speak to his colleagues about the operation of the Crown Prosecution Service, which seems to be reluctant to prosecute anyone whom the police charge with vandalism offences?

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman refers to a number of problems in relation to which we are introducing reforms, specifically in relation to the Crown Prosecution Service. Through the Crime and Disorder Bill, we shall introduce various sentences and the partnership approach, which is intended to address the hon. Gentleman's point that vandalism can build up to the more serious and violent crimes that are the scourge of modern society. Violent crime has increased by 13 per cent. in the Sussex area, and I would not be surprised if the problems to which the hon. Gentleman refers were related to that increase in more serious crimes.

Racial Violence

14. **Mrs. Mahon:** What recent representations he has received on tackling incidents of racial violence. [20171]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have received 118 responses to the Home Office consultation document on racial violence and harassment. They indicated wide-ranging support for the Government's proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill to introduce new offences of racially aggravated violence and harassment.

Mrs. Mahon: I assure my hon. Friend that almost everyone welcomes the new proposals. However, will he inform the House when the Stephen Lawrence inquiry will begin? He will be aware that many people—especially those who want to see an end to violence and murder—will follow that inquiry closely.

Mr. O'Brien: The public hearings for the Lawrence inquiry are likely to begin in February. Like my hon. Friend, we are very concerned about the growth in racist crime and violence of which one of the worst manifestations was the murder of Stephen Lawrence. That is why one of the Government's first acts in the Home Office was to arrange a judicial inquiry into that matter. We also hope to secure cross-party support for the measures in the Crime and Disorder Bill to tackle racist crime.

The lives of far too many people are damaged and destroyed by racial harassment and violence, and the Government are determined to crack down on mindless bigotry and thuggery. Some racist criminals may have to learn their lessons behind bars.

Drugs (Prisons)

16. **Mr. Spring:** What steps he is taking to tackle drugs misuse in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [20174]

Ms Quin: The Government are committed to reducing drugs misuse in prisons. We intend to reduce the supply of drugs in prisons and to provide help to prisoners who misuse, have misused or are at risk of misusing drugs. To help achieve that, I have asked the Prison Service to examine its drug strategy to determine how best to ensure an appropriate balance between security and control measures on the one hand, and treatment and prevention measures on the other. I expect to see the recommendations in April.

Mr. Spring: Given the alarming increase in drugs usage in prisons, will the hon. Lady assure the House that the inquiry will give proper recognition to the entry of drugs into prisons? Many of my constituents who live near prisons and others are concerned about the ease of access to life-threatening and highly addictive drugs in the prison system.

Ms Quin: The hon. Gentleman is right: that is a problem, and we have modified search procedures and other measures to take account of it. At the same time, we must also make as effective as possible the treatment and prevention measures to which I referred.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Does my hon. Friend agree that many prisoners with drug problems are put on methadone courses, which are causing difficulties? Will he commission an inquiry into the use of methadone in order to determine whether that is the right method for weaning people off drugs?

Ms Quin: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done in raising issues related to drugs misuse, which I know is a particular problem in his constituency. Methadone can play a stabilising role, but we need to look carefully at its effects as well as all other aspects, to ensure that we have a balanced treatment programme.

Mr. Malins: If the Minister is determined to stamp out drugs in our prisons, why does not she insist that those who work in prisons—including all prison staff—are subject to the same search procedures as visitors upon entering prisons?

Ms Quin: There is no evidence that that is a particular problem. We must direct our attention to those who work in or visit prisons, such as members of the legal profession and probation officers. We must ensure that search levels are appropriate for those who come into prisons.

Drugs and Crime

17. **Mr. Touhig:** What plans he has to tackle the link between drugs and crime. [20175]

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend will be aware that there is a specific measure in the Crime and Disorder Bill, which is currently in another place, for a treatment and testing order. That will require prisoners, at the will of the court, to undergo treatment and regular testing, and to be kept under review. It is an issue that we take seriously. We are concerned also that the lessons of the drug prevention initiative on interventions in the criminal justice system should be taken forward.

Mr. Touhig: I welcome my hon. Friend's firm response to the question of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). Will he confirm that the Government will firmly oppose the decriminalisation of any controlled substance?

Mr. Howarth: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. If the House or the Government were to send out the message that we were prepared to consider either legalising or decriminalising any currently banned substances, that would be a green light to all the young people and others who do not take drugs to do so. We are certainly not prepared to do that.

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: We were due to have a statement at this time, to be made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The statement is ready, but the Opposition spokesman has not yet seen it as there has been a computer breakdown. I shall therefore take a sensible approach and not take the statement now—we shall move on to the Second Reading of the School Standards and Framework Bill. As the Secretary of State for Education and Employment was not aware of this change, he is being brought to the House. I think that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has something to say.

I intend to suspend the sitting for 15 minutes until the Secretary of State arrives at the House. I shall then hear his opening statement, to give the Opposition time to read the statement that will be made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): First, Madam Speaker, I accept your ruling. Secondly, I apologise to the House. It could not have been foreseen, however, that at 3 o'clock all the computers in my office would go down. Those who put their faith in technology sometimes have a price to pay, and that was the price.

I fully understand that the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) has not had time to consider a very important statement, and I am content that we should proceed as you recommend, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Thank you, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, for the suspension that you propose. As we have been told that the Minister's statement was long in coming, does not what has happened show some incompetence by Ministry? It would have been helpful if we could have been provided with a draft of the statement earlier.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, there can be no points of order. I am seeking to be helpful to the House, including the Opposition. I shall suspend the sitting, and we shall resume at 3.45 pm. The statement will be heard after the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has introduced the School Standards and Framework Bill on Second Reading.

3.32 pm

Sitting suspended.

Orders of the Day

School Standards and Framework Bill

3.45 pm

On resuming—

Madam Speaker: I have an agreement from the two Front Benchers that they will complete their introduction of the Second Reading by five o'clock, so that the statement may take place at precisely that time. It will be put on the Annunciator for everyone in the House to see.

Order for Second Reading read.

3.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

If anyone is wondering where the beef is, it is in the Bill. [*Laughter.*] The Bill is the most substantial piece of legislation on education ever brought forward by a Labour Government, and I am very proud indeed to be the Secretary of State who introduces it. Given that it is Christmas week, I wish to take the opportunity to wish you, Madam Speaker, and the House, a happy and contented Christmas, free of leaks and telephone calls from the media, and full of Christmas cheer.

Given the range of goodies in the Bill, it is difficult to know where to start. The Bill is about raising standards; it seeks consensus; it offers a fresh start; it provides a new fervour for lifting horizons in the education system; and it is all about ensuring that teachers have the wherewithal and the power to do their job. Those who carry responsibility—whether as governors, as parents, as teachers, as members of education authorities or as the Secretary of State—need the powers to match rights and duties together.

The Bill is the most comprehensive and widespread measure that has been introduced on standards. It deals not with minutiae, but with the thrust of how we change the relationships in education to emphasise opportunity and equality for all our children. The Bill will match the responsibilities that each and every one of us carries for ourselves with the support necessary and the framework required to make that into a reality. The fulfilment of our promises and pledges commences in the Bill. It builds on the legislation that was given Royal Assent on 31 July to reduce class sizes for all five, six and seven-year-olds to no more than 30.

We will ensure that we begin the process of providing the kind of education for the many that has previously been available only to the few. We will put behind us the divisions and diversions, and the misdirection of time and energy that has been expended on structures rather than standards. The Bill will ensure that we can unite as a House and a nation behind the task of giving every child in our country the chance to succeed, and to contribute for themselves and their families to the prosperity and success of our nation.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): In my constituency, great interest is taken in the Bill. Does my right hon. Friend think that the social exclusion unit will assist him in attaining the objectives outlined in the Bill?

Mr. Blunkett: The work of the social exclusion unit in drawing together a range of Departments, agencies and organisations into a coherent social policy approach will make a substantial contribution to success. It will build on the measures in the Bill which complement and extend the measures in the Education (Schools) Act 1997, passed by the previous Parliament, which ensure that we can tackle head-on the prevention of exclusion and truancy. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) has been working with education authorities, and has announced £22 million of resources to stimulate and support projects to avoid exclusion.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): Before the Secretary of State says any more about uniting the nation, will he establish that the Bill applies to two nations, England and Wales, but not to Scotland? Is it not terribly important that those two nations, if they so wish, can develop distinctive policies, appropriate to their differing circumstances?

Mr. Blunkett: I can confirm that the Bill applies to England and to Wales, and that the clauses which apply to Wales will enable Wales to develop under the new Assembly its own perspective and ethos for education. This will build on the principles in the Bill, and on the principle of raising standards across the United Kingdom.

Education is our top priority, and our success will depend on it. Social cohesion, economic renewal and personal well-being all come from the opportunity to develop the talents of every child and the ability to build on their potential.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the Conservative-controlled Cambridgeshire county council which decided last week not to allocate the extra money that the Government have provided for education to the education service? Does he agree that that is a dreadful waste of an opportunity of which the county council is simply not taking advantage?

Mr. Blunkett: As my hon. Friend knows, I have written to every education authority and to the leaders of councils to appeal to them to ensure that the resources announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on 2 July reach the education system. My right hon. Friend announced that an extra £1 billion would be available for revenue for next year—an average increase of 5.7 per cent. We are asking every council to ensure that the resources are made available, and we will monitor their actions. We recognise that, after 18 years of retrenchment and cuts, it is difficult for councils to

balance competing policy pressures. We are mindful of that when asking them to ensure that education is, and will remain, a top priority for all.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Secretary of State has commented on Cambridgeshire. Will he also comment on the remarks of the leader of Derbyshire county council, who said:

"We would like nothing more than to pass the cash increase to our schools but it is unrealistic when we are facing a £14 million shortfall in our budget"?

Mr. Blunkett: Of course, that £14 million shortfall arises directly from the way in which Derbyshire was treated under the Conservatives. The Conservatives did not match the standard spending assessment with revenue, as we are doing. The council was treated badly by the Conservatives' refusal to reassess the SSA and the area cost adjustment; that is currently taking place as part of the wider review for 1999. Councils were also treated badly by the Conservatives as they were offered only £200 million nationally for the coming year for education, when we are offering more than £1 billion in extra resources.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): The Secretary of State, frankly, has missed the point of the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). The Government have announced their proposals for local government finance for next year—this Government, who have now been in office for eight months. Is the Secretary of State saying that the SSA figures fixed by the Government for next year are wrong? Is the right hon. Gentleman not prepared to stand behind the statement made by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions?

Mr. Blunkett: I said nothing of the sort. I said that the review of the allocation of standard spending assessment and area cost adjustment would take shape for 1999, and that, of course, after eight months, county and metropolitan districts and London borough councils are having to reflect on how they pick up the pieces after 18 years. In that respect, Derbyshire is no different from other authorities, except it was in a difficult position because of its relative position in the county council funding league.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Nothing is as straight as it seems when we hear Tories complaining about cuts in local government finance. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, for many years, when the Tory Government were in and we had Labour-controlled local government in Matlock, Derbyshire, the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and his hon. Friends, the former Members for Amber Valley, Erewash and Derbyshire, South, used to come to the Chamber not to ask for more money for Derbyshire—their local authority—but to demand that the Tory Secretary of State reduce the amount of money going to their constituents? I have seen hypocrisy and shades of hypocrisy, but I have never heard anything like what has been uttered here today.

Mr. Blunkett: I could not put it better myself.

Mr. Skinner: You're not supposed to.

Mr. Blunkett: Since it is Christmas, I acknowledge fully that I cannot.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will do so in a moment, but I want to make some progress. Part I of the Bill is a new step forward, which will create a new relationship of professionalism for teachers, building on the Teaching and Higher Education Bill, which is before the House of Lords and which will create: a general teaching council; new induction arrangements for qualified teachers; new inspection arrangements for teaching and for in-service training; a new job description for education authorities; new rights and responsibilities for parents through home-school agreements; a key role for head teachers with the new head teacher qualification; and a new way forward, building on the relationship of families of schools, which will unite primary and secondary schools, and school with school, instead of the previous pretence that we had a pseudo-market in which competition replaced co-operation, and schools were seen to be deliberately attacking their neighbours.

The lower class sizes I mentioned are part of the process, and they are reinforced and reaffirmed in this Bill. The education action zones laid out in clauses 10 to 13 have received wide acclaim. They will enable us to ensure that we can target resources and innovation where they are most needed, in both rural and urban areas, and that we can use the new-found flexibility to find out what works best and to spread it around the rest of the country as time and resources allow.

Clauses 6 and 7 describe the education development plans that education authorities will have to set out, which are linked to the present new early years development programmes. I pay tribute to those authorities that are doing a excellent job and have enabled us to replace the nursery vouchers scheme so smoothly and quickly.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, who has been generous to colleagues in giving way. Surely, all those improvements—as he sees them—need to be financed. What will he tell Dorset county council, which, for every extra £1 that his Department wants it to spend on education, is having to take £1.40 off the care of old people in my constituency? In fact, there has been a real-terms decrease of 2.5 per cent. in the Dorset county council budget, which is probably the lowest budget in the country, anyway.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman's concern is commendable, but his facts are incorrect. The resources that have been allocated for education match, pound for pound, with revenue support, the lift in standard spending assessment. He might not be aware of it, but this is the first time since capping was introduced in the mid-1980s

[Mr. Blunkett]

that a Government have matched for a specific service the revenue support with the SSA uplift; that is why we have been able to ask education authorities throughout the country to allocate those resources by taking the difficult decisions that are required to balance the needs of social services and other essential services within their overall budgets.

The role of local education authorities will be inspected, and the new measures in the Bill allow us to intervene directly when we believe that an education authority is failing children and the education service. Instead of hand wringing, which was a familiar sight in the past, we will have the power to take directly whatever steps are necessary to ensure that education authorities deliver our pledges. Clause 8 confers the power to take over specific functions within the education authority, and allows them to be undertaken either by another LEA or by a specific organisation or private concern specified by the Department and myself.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Will the Secretary of State confirm that that represents a significant shift in power from local education authorities to the Department, and that the Bill goes further in that respect than any of its predecessors?

Mr. Blunkett: The Conservative Government set up the Funding Agency for Schools, and ran schools directly from the Department; they established what was initially a very rigid national curriculum, which had to be duly watered down and loosened up after the first Dearing inquiry; and they imposed on the education service the most draconian restrictions that we have ever known. The hon. Gentleman has the cheek of the devil to accuse us.

The powers that we are taking are to allow us to match the rhetoric of action with the reality of action. We are able to do what other Governments have pretended that they would like to do, as shown by the previous Secretary of State's intervention in Calderdale and her hand wringing in Nottinghamshire. We have the resources and the power to do something. Those powers balance the correct autonomy at local level with the responsibility to carry out our manifesto pledge to ensure that every child, in whatever local education authority, has the same opportunities.

Intervention in LEAs, as with intervention in schools, will be in inverse proportion to success. If they are working well and doing the job, there will be no interference or direct intervention from the Department; if they are not, we will not simply sit on the sidelines wishing that we could do something about it: we will have the power to act.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I pay tribute to both the Secretary of State and the Minister for School Standards, who has come to York twice to meet me and the staff and management of the Funding Agency for Schools to discuss the implications of the Bill for the Agency.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the staff and managers at the Funding Agency for Schools have executive skills—skills in administering education services—that are not available elsewhere in the Department, which is concerned with policy making, not executive functions? Those skills include, for example, capital planning and the administration of the Bill's education action zones and development plans, which ought to be preserved. Will the Department consider how to use those skills in the future, as well as seeking a future use for its offices at Albion wharf in York?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman and the House know that interventions should be sharp and to the point. More than 40 hon. Members want to speak in the debate. Interventions must be interventions, or hon. Members may not be called when they seek to take part in the debate proper.

Mr. Blunkett: I am delighted that 40 hon. Members wish to speak. I thank them for not going for a drink tonight. I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It may have been too long, but it was to the point in the issues that he raised on behalf of his constituents.

I confirm that we are mindful of the insecurity and fear among staff at the Funding Agency for Schools and of the need to use their talents, experience and skills to the full in implementing our policies, helping us develop plans for local education and schools, establishing targets, ensuring that we can implement our new deal for school, and investing capital effectively. All those aims will be aided by the expertise that people have gained over the years. I shall ensure that I keep my hon. Friend regularly in touch with what we do in that direction.

Part II deals with issues that relate to the Funding Agency for Schools and to the new framework, which will replace the friction, division and unfairness of the past by drawing together schools of all shapes and sizes into the three new categories in the Bill: community, voluntary and foundation. We listened carefully to the representations made in the consultation. There were 8,500 responses, the greatest number of people and organisations in recent history to respond to a consultative White Paper, including 3,500 from individual parents. We are delighted that people were able and willing to make those representations.

We listened to individuals and organisations, and to the Churches, who told us that they wanted voluntary schools to stay voluntary rather than becoming foundation schools, so as to retain their unique ethos. We were happy to agree. We guaranteed the Churches that their specific role and the ethos of denominational Churches will not be affected. We agreed to make it clear in the Bill that the Secretary of State, rather than the new adjudicator, will be responsible for that area.

I know that some organisations wanted only two categories of school. It has been by building consensus that we have been able to gain support for the new framework to stop the dog fighting, the conflict and the division. It is on that basis that we are moving forward with the new categories, all of which are based entirely on fair funding, on accountability, on inclusiveness of decision-making, and on being part of school planning.

That is also how we are moving forward on the admissions policies through which all schools will play their part in creating a new fairness. Let me spell out, as do clauses 43 to 51, that, from now on, no school will

receive additional funding because of its status; such funding will be given only to meet the needs of the children that schools educate.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): While I welcome the Secretary of State's decision on denominational schools, and recognise that he listened carefully to the consultation on them, will he explain why he ignored the responses to the consultation on grant-maintained schools? Is this not a case of "if it isn't broke, don't try to fix it"? Why does he insist on bringing back local authority governors—political placemen of his party—to interfere with the great success of grant-maintained schools?

Mr. Blunkett: In building consensus, we tried to get over such language, which reflects the past. I am delighted that Pauline Latham and George Phipson, the joint chairs of the Grant-Maintained Joint Monitoring Group, which represents 1,200 grant-maintained schools, wrote to me saying:

"We are writing to express our support for the inclusion of a Foundation Category within the School Standards and Framework Bill. It is our belief that the overwhelming majority of current Grant Maintained schools will opt for this category after the Bill has been enacted next year."

It continues:

"GMJMG warmly welcomes the priority which the Government has attached to education. We strongly support the view that education standards should take precedence over school structures."

One cannot get a clearer position than that. I commend the grant-maintained sector for it, because it is looking forward to a new century, not backwards to a divisionist past.

That is the difference between this Government and the previous one. We do not seek conflict; we seek to heal the wounds. We seek to put together a consensus for improvement and change, according to which we can ensure that people can work together rather than against each other; where schools and children are not threatened; and where teachers doing their job are not threatened. Through the extension of local management of schools, we will also seek to ensure that all schools have the opportunity to develop their standards and to determine, through their own autonomy, how they develop. They should be able to use innovation and enterprise to deliver to their children the best possible standards of education.

One of the most difficult things that I will have to do in my time as Secretary of State for Education and Employment is to reunite schools over divided admissions policies. It will be my task and that of my Ministers to draw up new circulars. As we said in our manifesto, we will build on circular 6/93, which was published by the previous Government, to ensure that all children have a chance and are treated fairly in terms of admission to schools.

Part III of the Bill allows me to correct the free-for-all that disadvantaged children, and continues to do so in key areas of the country, whether Watford or Bromley. When considering the shambles of the admissions policy in such areas, I am reminded of the words of the former right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, Nick Ridley, when he was Secretary of State for Transport. He famously said that he thought that the answer to traffic jams was to do away with traffic lights, on the grounds that, eventually, people would leave their cars at home because they would not be able to get past the end of their street.

If one followed the logic of previous Government's admissions policy to its rightful conclusion, the result would be exactly the same jams and snarl-ups as parents fought one another, regardless of the consequences for other children.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I am interested in the Secretary of State's comments about including all children in new admission arrangements. Can he therefore explain why he has not sought fit to make it a requirement on all local education authorities to include children with special educational needs? That would make our society, through our maintained schools, a wholly inclusive one.

Mr. Blunkett: The Green Paper we published recently—which the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Yardley dealt with at length in the House a couple of Fridays ago—seeks to include special support where it is necessary and appropriate and will ensure that we design the system to meet the needs of the child rather than the other way round.

I am happy to receive representations about the development of admissions policies that ensure that special needs children are taken into account. Let me go further—I am mindful to hear from people how they believe we can best ensure that over-subscribed schools are able to take children with special needs as well as those who previously had difficulties, and encourage them and help them flourish. That is not always the case, given that the admissions procedures have not always allowed over-subscribed schools to take on that challenge. Instead, those arrangements have tended to divert such children to under-subscribed schools, where places exist in abundance. I look forward to people contributing to that important debate.

Back in June 1995, we spelled out our position on grammar schools. I am able to confirm that the Bill and the criteria I will lay down as part of our admissions policy will remove partial selection where it currently exists. That causes havoc in terms of the admission of local children, and denies fairness to parents because of the lack of choices and opportunities open to them.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, as he has been generous with his time. As he says that people are fighting over places, could he explain why, given that Bromley gives places to nearly 3,500 secondary pupils and nearly 1,500 primary school pupils from outside the borough, he has not reversed the Greenwich ruling?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Lady raised that question with me in a slightly different form during questions on education and employment—it seems a long time ago, but was only about 10 days ago. I shall give her the answer: we are not against the exercise of a parental preference; we are against situations in which, for no other reason than the partial selection system and because parents are exercising their preference from a distance, local parents living in close proximity to a school in, for example, Bromley, find it impossible to get their children into it.

[Mr. Blunkett]

I have made it clear several times that we are not prepared to overturn the Greenwich judgment. It is specifically, although not exclusively, a London problem, and we want London boroughs to co-operate to begin to ensure that we can make sense out of what is currently a shambles.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The Secretary of State has been more than helpful in trying to resolve the problems that we have in Southend-on-Sea, where four people's grammar schools take 25 per cent. of the children, and where, despite high unemployment and many social problems, we have higher educational achievements overall than any other part of Essex.

However, will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear that, as long as local primary school parents are in favour of the continuation of those four grammar schools, they will be permitted to continue? As he considers that, will he bear in mind the appalling situation in Glasgow, where I used to live, where they had the most dreadful education results ever recorded, partly because all the selective schools there were abolished?

Mr. Blunkett: The fact of whether there is selection or non-selection does not affect the standard of education, which depends on the teaching in the classroom, the holistic work of the school, the development of links with the community, the support of parents, and the work which, I accept, needs to be done with parents whose interest in, and commitment to, education is so variable.

I can confirm to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that, in the case of individual grammar schools, parents of children at the appropriate feeder and primary schools will make the decision. Only where 20 per cent. of the parents in those individual grammar schools wish to trigger a ballot will a ballot take place.

I want to make it clear this afternoon that a disparate admissions policy makes it more, rather than less, difficult for the teachers to do their job in balancing able and less able children with different aptitudes. That is why we are establishing an adjudicator, who will complement the criteria on admissions and help to ensure that a smooth change is achieved, and that, where there is disagreement at local level, there will be a right of appeal on policy matters.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): My right hon. Friend will know that democratic socialists, almost by definition, are opposed to grammar schools, and that many of us would vote to close them tomorrow because we believe that they completely undermine education in our constituencies, particularly where they exist near our constituencies. Does my right hon. Friend look forward to some time in the future when, under a Labour Government, those infernal institutions will have disappeared for ever, and we will be able to look forward to a secondary system in this country that feeds equality to all?

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful for that very enjoyable question. Perhaps the best way I can answer it is to quote directly from our document "Diversity and Excellence", which I published on the day that the previous Prime Minister resigned to stand against himself in June 1995—two and a half years ago:

> "Our opposition to academic selection at 11 has always been clear, but while we have never supported grammar schools in their exclusion of children by examination, change can only come through local agreement. Such change in the character of a school would only follow a clear demonstration of support from the parents affected by such decisions."

That principle is embodied in the Bill and in the criteria that I shall lay down; it is in our manifesto, and I shall carry it out to the letter.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to the Secretary of State, who has been extremely generous in giving way. In view of the shifting sand that is the Government's policy on selection, will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to explain to the House his understanding of the difference in meaning between the words ability and aptitude?

Mr. Blunkett: It is the same meaning that was built into the previous Government's legislation and the criteria laid out in DfEE circular 6/93. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the previous Secretary of State, who will no doubt enlighten him. The adjudicator that I shall establish will ensure that aptitude is not used as a cover for selection. That is why we are establishing the adjudication system.

The whole thrust of what we are doing is to improve standards, and I am pleased to announce that we are notifying education authorities today of the next tranche of resources relating to our standards fund. The additional £59 million will include £49 million to establish in-service training for teachers and new literacy co-ordinators, and to purchase books. There will be an extra £4 million for the excellent work that the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) is doing on family literacy, which, as I said, is so crucial to our success in achieving progress.

We are allocating £3 million to extend the premier league initiative for after-school and homework centres, so that division one clubs in England can also participate. I look forward to the possibility in the near future of rugby league and rugby union clubs participating, although some good rugby league clubs, including Sheffield Eagles, are already doing an excellent job of work in helping children out of school hours. Finally, £3.3 million will be used to help reading recovery for pupils transferring from primary to secondary school; we all remember that the previous Government did away altogether with national funding for the reading recovery scheme.

This afternoon, we have an opportunity to spell out the Government's unequivocal commitment to the task of healing our education system, fostering innovation and ensuring that people have the power to act sensibly in making those aims come alive in their own schools and communities. The Bill will ensure that 14 and 15-year-olds can legally take part in work experience, and so enable them to develop their contact with the world of work while remaining within school and benefiting from GCSE, GNVQ1 and the experiments that are taking place in further education.

The Bill takes an holistic approach. We are reinstating nutritional standards in school meals 17 years after the Tory Government withdrew them. We are overcoming silly anomalies so that schools can provide free school milk, and provide it at any time of the day, rather than being subject to the nonsense that exists under current law. We are ensuring that capability procedures for teachers are tough but fair. We are making it possible to co-ordinate what is happening between schools and colleges and between school and school. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and his colleagues will also be able to do so.

The Bill sets behind us two decades of muddle and dissension, and builds on the progress that we have made in the past eight months in reinvigorating, re-motivating and bringing new morale to the education service. I offer this Christmas as a new beginning for the education service, and I look forward to everyone of good will working with us to implement it on behalf of our children.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, I advise the House that Madam Speaker has decided that the 10-minutes rule will apply to all Back-Bench speeches this evening.

4.24 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I start by joining the Secretary of State in wishing you, as occupant of the Chair, and the whole House a happy Christmas. That is something which does not divide those on the Front Benches in this debate.

However, my right hon. and hon. Friends will vote against Second Reading, because the Bill does not deliver the things that the Secretary of State claimed for it and because—even worse—in important respects it actively undermines the delivery of higher school standards and better prospects for British schoolchildren.

In the White Paper "Excellence in Schools", published in July 1997, the Secretary of State began to set out his policies for schools. The White Paper set out some policy principles, which we should compare with the detail of the Bill that the House is asked to consider today.

In the White Paper the Secretary of State said that he regarded standards as more important than structure. He repeated that proposition today, but the Bill is not, as he sought to argue, focused on the delivery of standards. The Bill is the centrepiece of another major restructuring of the educational framework. That is why it is called the School Standards and Framework Bill. Fifty-five of the 124 clauses of the Bill marshalled together in part II of the Bill set out, as the title of the part makes clear, a

"new framework for maintained schools".

It is not true to say that the Bill does not deal with school structure.

The fifth principle set out in the White Paper was:

"There will be zero tolerance of underperformance"

and the sixth principle was:

"Government will work in partnership"—

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): The right hon. Gentleman skipped over that one a bit quickly.

Mr. Dorrell: I am coming back to it. I am putting the two together in the interests of brevity:

"zero tolerance of underperformance" and

"Government will work in partnership with all those committed to raising standards."

Yet the Bill abolishes grant-maintained schools. It establishes a machinery for abolishing grammar schools. How does that square with the principle that the Government will work with those who are committed to raising standards in British schools? This is not "zero tolerance of underperformance"; it is zero tolerance of high performance.

Another principle set out in the White Paper is that

"Intervention will be in inverse proportion to success"—

yet the Bill establishes, by means of the education development planning process and a myriad of other planning processes, a centralised planning structure giving unprecedented powers to the holder of the Secretary of State's office, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) pointed out. This is not a Bill that delivers intervention in inverse proportion to success, but a Bill that provides the Secretary of State with unprecedented powers to intervene across the board in the British school system.

Most important, the White Paper sought to argue that this gave effect to the Government's priority area. When asked what is the Government's priority, the Prime Minister is wont say, "Education, education, education," yet it is now obvious that that claim has no clothes.

During the general election campaign, the Prime Minister repeatedly said that he sought to deliver the increased emphasis on education that he wanted his Government to provide, by reducing expenditure elsewhere on welfare. On the launch of the Labour party manifesto on 3 April, the Prime Minister said:

"Education will be our number one priority; and we will increase the share of national income spent on education as we decrease it on the bills of economic and social failure".

That is what the Prime Minister said on 3 April, and he repeated it time and again during the election campaign.

But now we know the truth. This was a strategy with no detail attached to it—certainly no detail to which the present Secretary of State for Education and Employment was signed up. We have seen how signed up to these principles he feels, in the memorandum that was leaked to yesterday's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph*. In that memorandum, the Secretary of State's argument is: "Of course I understand the need for reform of the welfare system; it is just that I agree with almost none of the principles that the Treasury and the Department of Social Security are discussing."

I was a Treasury Minister in the last Government at one point, and any Treasury Minister is familiar with the Secretary of State's argument. Since the dawn of time, colleagues throughout Whitehall have written to Treasury Ministers, "We agree wholeheartedly with the general principle that you are trying to pursue, but we disagree with the specific proposition that is being considered." *[Interruption.]*

The Secretary of State asks what this has to do with the Bill. Every schoolmaster and schoolmistress—every teacher working in the system—would say that, if we are to improve standards in British schools, the Secretary of State's key priority must be to deliver extra resources.

[Mr. Dorrell]

The key to success in the delivery of that objective, according to the Prime Minister, is to release resources elsewhere in the system, because that is the only way in which he sees extra money going into British schools. We know, however, that the Secretary of State is now resisting the very process that the Prime Minister said was the key to delivering extra resources.

The Secretary of State knows very well that the argument set out in yesterday's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* is central to the delivery of his responsibilities. He asks, "What has this to do with the Bill?", but he knows the answer very well. He knows that the answer is that, unless the Government can deliver the welfare reform that he opposes in particular, he will not have the resources to deliver on his rhetoric about school standards.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that my right hon. Friend was somewhat disappointed by the Secretary of State's reply to my intervention. The right hon. Gentleman did not appear to know that, for every pound in the increase in Dorset's standard spending assessment, £1.40 was taken away from disabled people and the social services budget. Surely he realises that the increase is a con trick of smoke and mirrors. There are no extra resources; resources are being taken away from other local government services.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Virtually all the increase in resources provided in the Government's plans for local authorities as a whole have been claimed as an increase in the education SSA, but that will be a realistic interpretation of the facts only if every other local government service—social services being far the most important—delivers a totally unrealistic budget for next year as compared with this year.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): If the right hon. Gentleman believes that increased resources are the only way to improve education, why did he spend the last 18 years in government cutting education spending in my authority?

Mr. Dorrell: During those 18 years, we saw increases year by year in the resources available to British schools. Furthermore, we never claimed—and I have not claimed today—that it is only about resources. It is also about structure. That is why I shall go on to argue that the changes in structure that form the centrepiece of the Bill are changes in the wrong direction.

It would not, however, be right to claim that every aspect of the Bill is unwelcome. I welcome some aspects—for instance, the priority that the Government give education. That is not new, of course; it is a commonplace of prime ministerial speeches. It has been so since the days of Lord Callaghan, Lady Thatcher and my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), and the present incumbent has continued the tradition. It is a cliché, but none the less a welcome cliché, that education is a high priority to any Government. I agree with the Government about that.

I also welcome the fact that the Government are committed to continuing the testing regime and the publication of those tests, which we introduced in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party. The Secretary of State now recognises that it is an important element of keeping the system open and accountable to parents and the wider community. I very much welcome the fact that the Government are committed to those principles.

I also welcome the elements in the Bill that deal with education action zones. Anyone looking at the publicity which the Secretary of State secured when the Bill was published could be forgiven for thinking that the Bill was almost exclusively about education action zones. The four clauses devoted to that subject are broadly welcome as they represent an important element in improving education in difficult parts of the country.

However, I hope that the Minister will clarify one aspect of those four clauses when he winds up. Clause 13 allows an education action zone to opt out of the national arrangements for school teachers' pay and conditions. This is exactly the same Bill which withdraws those rights from grant-maintained schools that have hitherto had the right.

I should be glad to know why the Government are providing to schools within education action zones exactly the same right that they are removing from today's grant-maintained schools. It was right that grant-maintained schools had such an option, and I certainly do not oppose it in the context of grant-maintained schools. I simply oppose its withdrawal from schools which currently have the right to opt out of those conditions.

Mr. Blunkett: How many?

Mr. Dorrell: The Minister asks how many. That question is not relevant. He proposes to provide that opportunity for schools in education action zones, presumably because he is persuaded by the argument of allowing individual schools greater flexibility around teachers' pay and conditions. I agree with him about that, but do not understand why he wants to focus it on a few schools and not, to use the Government's rhetoric, on "schools for the many".

I wish to dwell on one aspect of the Bill, because I find it rather better than I had expected. I refer to clauses 90 to 94 on selection. The Secretary of State has always had interesting things to say about selection, although not all of them are totally compatible with each other. Lord Hattersley attributed to the right hon. Gentleman the phrase, "Read my lips: no selection by examination or interview." I should be interested to know whether the Secretary of State wishes to deny it—he has never sought to do so. That was alleged to be his policy.

A couple of years ago, at the Labour party conference, the Prime Minister said:

"No return to selection, academic or social."

I presume that that was before he chose the school to which his children now go. At the beginning of this year, the Secretary of State was also pretty clear on the subject. He said:

"We are not intent on extending further the selective process."

During the election campaign, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"We are not in favour of selection."

There are a number of different nuances, but right up to election day, the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) could reasonably have expected

those on the Labour Front Bench to be clear in their opposition at least to the extension of selection, and occasionally to the principle.

It would be untrue to say that there has been a flash of blinding light, but there appears to be a flickering dawn of realisation on the part of the Government that that is incompatible with their commitment to high standards and to working in partnership with those who share that commitment. The relevant clauses start unambiguously enough. Clause 90 says:

"No admission arrangements . . . may make provision for selection by ability unless"—

and then lists a range of exceptions. I suspect that some will have been expected by Labour Back-Benchers, although not with much enthusiasm, as the Government made it clear before election day that they would allow, with considerable—and from my point of view, unwelcome—restrictions, the continued operation of at least some grammar schools.

Clause 91 makes it clear that, where existing selective arrangements are in place in schools that are not grammar schools, there is no statutory bar on that, so we are making a further step forward. Clause 92 allows selection in the context of banding arrangements, but clause 93 is one of the most interesting—certainly one of the most hopeful—clauses in the Bill, because it allows selection of up to 10 per cent. of school population by aptitude in any school where the admission authority is satisfied that that school has a specialism.

I hope that the Minister will make it crystal clear that any foundation school and any voluntary-aided school within the terms of the Bill is its own admission authority. Therefore, if I read the Bill correctly, the governing body of any voluntary aided school or any foundation school has it within its power to determine that it is a school with a specialism, and to select up to 10 per cent. of the school population by aptitude for that specialism, within the terms of clause 93.

Mr. Byers *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dorrell: The Minister nods in assent, and I am pleased that he does, because I regard that as a significant further break in the ice of Labour's hitherto blanket hostility to the principle of selection. I welcome the further break-up of that iceberg.

Mr. Byers: For the record, I was nodding my head to indicate that I would reply in detail to those points when I wind up the debate.

Mr. Dorrell: I look forward to listening to what the Minister says in detail. If my interpretation of the clause is right, it allows an opportunity for schools to develop greater specialism and diversity, and to deliver the commitment that the Government claim to improving the quality of education available to British schoolchildren.

If that development of policy is welcome, the same cannot be said of the treatment of grammar schools in the Bill. Clauses 95 to 97 establish the machinery for the abolition of grammar schools. That will please the hon. Member for Workington, but it will not please anyone anywhere in the country who wants to provide the opportunity for children from whatever background to improve themselves, and to offer the best possible ladder to opportunity and improved chances in life.

The Government's attitude to grammar schools has several aspects that stand out. One is that they still see it unambiguously as a one-way ratchet, despite their dawning, flickering realisation on some issues. The partnership that they claim with those who are committed to improving schools is a partnership only with those who currently have grammar schools. Despite all the rhetoric about diversity, they offer no opportunity for a particular area or community to introduce a grammar school structure if it chooses to do so. I do not understand the logic that enables a Government to allow the continued existence of grammar schools in one area, but not to allow their introduction in another.

All the detail of this passage, as the Secretary of State will acknowledge, is to be set out. We shall oppose these clauses when they come up in Committee, because we think that they are wrong-headed. I seek from the Minister when he winds up this evening a commitment that the draft regulations, which will be the teeth of these clauses, will be published in good time, so that we have them before we discuss the clauses in Committee.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether, in a particular set of circumstances, if parents had voted for the closure of a grammar school, he would think it right or wrong for a Secretary of State to adhere to the views of local people?

Mr. Dorrell: What I think is wrong is for the Government to introduce a set of clauses that are so one-sided that they provide only a one-way ratchet.

That is not the only, or even the main, act of vandalism in the Bill. At its heart are the 55 clauses to which I have referred, which deal with the new framework for schools. They have a simple purpose: to abolish grant-maintained schools. The cornerstone—the sine qua non—of the Bill is to abolish the locally managed grant-maintained schools that have been developing in our system over the past few years.

That is why this is a bad Bill, and it is the most important reason why we shall oppose it this evening. It reveals that all the talk of a commitment to work with those who are committed to high standards is simply humbug. Let us look at the record of grant-maintained schools.

For A-levels, half of the top 100 schools in Britain are grant-maintained schools. The top three places are held by grant-maintained schools. For GCSE, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A to C grades is 53 per cent. in grant-maintained schools, and 40 per cent. in the rest of the maintained sector. According to evidence published by the Secretary of State less than one month ago, 240 schools have improved for four years running in terms of their published results. Of those, one third are grant-maintained schools. Eight out of 20—40 per cent.—of the top 20 schools are grant-maintained schools. That sector accounts for 6 per cent. of the total number of schools in the system.

Mr. Blunkett: Twenty per cent. of secondary schools.

Mr. Dorrell: The Secretary of State says from a sedentary position 20 per cent. of secondary schools.

[Mr. Dorrell]

That is true, and shows that grant-maintained schools are performing roughly twice as well as the rest of the maintained sector.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, with the best will in the world, and being as generous as possible to local education authorities, they have a much wider range of perceived responsibilities than individual schools; that grant-maintained schools have frequently, in my area at least, put the interests of their pupils at the head of their priorities; and that, as a consequence of taking themselves out of the local education authority's straitjacket, grant-maintained schools have been able to perform a great deal better than they would otherwise have done?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right. Why have grant-maintained schools delivered such performance? It is as my hon. Friend says: because their responsibility is focused within the school, they are free from excessive intervention from elsewhere in the system, and they can fulfil their responsibility to deliver standards to the children in those schools.

Mr. Blunkett: If one gives a school more money, extensions of its buildings, and the power to choose whichever pupils it wishes, is it not possible that the school might do better?

Mr. Dorrell: The Secretary of State is hunting for excuses. As he well knows, the funds available to grant-maintained schools were determined by reference to the other schools in the area in which that grant-maintained school was working. The Secretary of State is not prepared to face the facts about the improved performance of the education system that has been delivered by having responsibility focused within the individual school.

The abolition of local management in the grant-maintained sector, and the taking of power back into the hands of the local education authority—and even worse, into the hands of the Department for Education and Employment—is the change that goes to the heart of the Bill.

We believe that schools are local institutions that should be accountable to the community and responsive to the needs of the children in them. The result of the development of that policy has been a diverse and flexible system. That, among other reasons, is why I support the Secretary of State in his commitment to develop selection by aptitude in order to allow a more diverse, flexible system. I look forward to hearing the Minister explaining that policy from the Dispatch Box later this evening.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If grant-maintained schools are so wonderful, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why the majority of Conservative Back Benchers send their children to public schools and totally bypass the state education system?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has scored a spectacular own goal. My right hon. and hon. Friends want to see a diverse system which includes support for those children who wish to enter the independent education system. If the hon. Gentleman seriously wanted to introduce a unified system, he should not have voted against the abolition of the assisted places scheme.

Integral to the Government's vision of centralisation of power are those passages in the Bill that deal with education development plans. The Secretary of State says, quite rightly, that every school should have a plan for the development of the service it delivers. However, the Secretary of State then goes off the rails. He believes that, because each school must have a plan, it must be accountable to the local education authority for all the key details of that plan. The local education authority is then accountable to the Secretary of State for the delivery of the key details of that plan.

The planning structure that the Secretary of State has erected in this Bill resembles nothing so much as the orthodoxy of 1960s economic planning structures. According to the structure established by the Secretary of State, everything throughout the school system is accountable not within the school—as should occur in a local institution—or even to the local education authority, but, through the planning structure, to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Willis *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Gentleman, as a Liberal Democrat, is true to the traditions of liberal local democracy, he should be as opposed as anyone to the nationalisation of the school system that the Secretary of State is introducing.

Mr. Willis: I apologise for attempting to make my point so impolitely. Was not the introduction of the national curriculum by the previous Conservative Government a gross act of centralisation the like of which we had not seen before?

Mr. Dorrell: I do not agree. I was talking about the planning structure and, as I have given an undertaking to sit down at five o'clock, I invite the hon. Gentleman to consider the terms of clauses 7 and 8. They give the Secretary of State responsibility for approving every local education authority plan. Local education authorities will be required to change the plans if the Secretary of State does not agree with them. The Secretary of State will have the power to change the plans and, even if he does not change them, he has a duty—not merely the power—to monitor the discharge of those plans by local education authorities.

The power that the Bill affords to the Secretary of State for Education resembles nothing so much as the power that the Health Secretary has to intervene directly in appointed local health authorities. Accountability for the health service in this country has always been through the Secretary of State to the House. However, accountability in the school system is not to an appointed local education authority but to a locally elected education authority.

In this Bill, the Secretary of State removes all the checks from the British school system and makes himself accountable for every detail of what goes on in that system. If the Bill is passed as presently drafted, the Secretary of State will have nowhere to hide: he will be responsible from the Government Dispatch Box for the

services delivered in British schools in the same way as his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—his comrade in arms against the Chancellor of the Exchequer—is accountable for what goes on in an avowedly national health service.

That point is emphasised by the terms of clause 8 which, for the first time, give the Secretary of State the power to issue instructions directly to the staff of a local education authority over the heads of elected councillors. The Bill will grant that new power to nationalise our school system. I can think of no better way of summing up my reservations about the Bill than by quoting the words of the Minister for School Standards. On 2 March 1993, the then hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers), referring to a clause in the Conservative's Education Bill, said:

"It starkly demonstrates the way in which power is being concentrated in the hands of the Secretary of State. It does not give power to schools, governors or parents; it gives power to the holder of the office of Secretary of State for Education. It represents one of the most dramatic extensions of Whitehall power since 1945."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 178-9.]

The Minister has summed up this situation accurately: his words have become a boomerang that has hit his right hon. Friend directly between the eyes.

The Bill is about not school standards, but school bureaucracy. How else can the Government explain the provisions in the Bill regarding not just education development plans but school organisation plans? I shall detain the House for a moment on the Bill's proposals in that regard. School organisation plans seem to be constituted according to a formula that has not been used since they drew up the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire.

Clause 25 gives each local education authority responsibility for preparing a school organisation plan. That plan is then considered by a school organisation committee, the membership of which is unclear but the decisions of which must be unanimous. If the committee fails—through some mischance—to reach a unanimous decision, the adjudicator is called in to decide what the plan should be. The local education authority remains responsible for carrying out the plan—unless the Secretary of State intervenes under the terms of schedule 7, in which case he may offer another set of proposals that presumably compete with those of the adjudicator. There must then be a public inquiry, but it must find in a manner consistent with the Secretary of State's ruling. That is an extraordinary way of confusing responsibility and producing a diffuse system of responsibility for school organisation.

As is often the case with the present Government, the aspirations to high quality education are not wrong, but the Secretary of State has failed totally to translate his words into anything resembling action. The Bill does not promise improvements in education—still less does it live by the excellent principles set out in the Secretary of State's White Paper, such as intervention being in inverse proportion to success and working in conjunction, in co-operation and in partnership with those who are committed to higher standards in education. The Bill delivers centralisation of power on the local education authority and on the office of the Secretary of State. It also delivers tier upon tier of new bureaucracy—education development plans, plans to reduce class sizes, early years development plans and school organisation plans.

The piece de resistance at the end of the Bill is the home-school contract for every school. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members cheer that proposal. Schools are obliged to go through a preparation process, a consultation process and an adjustment process regarding the new home school contracts. What do such contracts amount to at the end of that process? The answer is: not a row of beans. The contracts are unenforceable, and they will influence the actions of neither the school nor the parents.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): The purpose of home-school contracts is to try to ensure that parents take responsibility for their children's education and that they work in partnership with schools to achieve the best for their children. In the past few years, schools have been unable to work as closely as they should with parents. That is the point of home-school contracts.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it would be desirable to have home-school contracts which influence parents and make them more supportive regarding what goes on in schools and which bind schools more closely with parents. I agree whole-heartedly with that idea. However, I cannot understand how that objective will be delivered by requiring schools to go through a hugely bureaucratic process and not allowing them any means of securing the changes in parental behaviour that the hon. Gentleman seeks. The Bill makes it crystal clear that those pieces of paper will not be allowed to influence the way in which any individual acts. What is the point of having a contract that has no influence over the actions of individuals?

The one thing that the Bill does not promise, as the Secretary of State made clear in his sedentary interjection earlier in my speech, is more money. That is the one thing that head teachers and staffroom teachers throughout Britain are looking to the Government, including the Secretary of State, to deliver so as to put flesh on the bones of the Government's rhetoric.

I see that the Secretary of State for Health has joined us in the Chamber. The right hon. Gentleman is a comrade in arms in the opposition to delivering the specific changes that the Prime Minister sees as the only means of delivering the improvement that the right hon. Gentleman wants for the health service and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment wants for schools. When the history of the next three months is written, it will not be the Bill and its consideration in Committee that will be remembered. Instead, history will focus on the Secretary of State's failure to deliver his much-trumpeted 5.7 per cent., and that is what we shall be monitoring in the months ahead.

BSE

5 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the beef industry and on BSE and its consequences, but first I repeat my earlier apology to you and to Members on both sides of the House for the problem that occurred with the computers in my office earlier today, which necessitated the postponement of the statement. I recognise that that postponement has not been convenient for right hon. and hon. Members, and I give my unreserved apology for that happening.

Many UK beef producers face exceptional difficulties including closed export markets, the need to adjust to BSE-related controls and low prices.

The House will be aware that livestock producers have demonstrated at ports and elsewhere over recent weeks. Some demonstrations have involved interference with trade and, in one case, the destruction of a consignment. Such action will not be tolerated here.

The Government have already committed very large sums to supporting the beef industry. All told, some £2 billion was paid in 1996-97, and we expect to spend some £1.4 billion in 1997-98. These are very large sums indeed. They cannot be maintained indefinitely.

There is over-supply of beef throughout Europe, and a long-term decline in consumption of beef everywhere. The Government are convinced of the need for substantial restructuring of the European industry. The European Commission also recognises that restructuring is vital, and has proposed radical changes to the EU beef regime in the framework of Agenda 2000. The Government strongly agree and believe that the restructuring needs to start now. In the interests of consumers, taxpayers, the environment and not least farmers themselves, we must reform the beef industry so that it becomes economically and environmentally sustainable.

Our long-term aim should be to reduce the scale of the subsidy to producers. That is what we shall continue to argue for in Brussels. As BSE is eliminated from the UK cattle herd, the current very high levels of taxpayers' support will also inevitably be wound down.

In future, there will be fewer producers but a more viable beef industry in the UK and Europe generally. It is essential for UK producers to plan now on the basis that major changes will come about. In the long run, such structural change will be beneficial for the industry and for the economy as a whole. The Government are committed to bringing it about as quickly as possible.

The Government therefore now intend to open early consultations with the farming industry to achieve the restructuring that is essential. In that context, we shall explore whether the EU's early retirement scheme and other EU structural measures can play a part in achieving the Government's objectives in the longer term.

Also with a view to restructuring, the Commission has proposed as part of Agenda 2000 that consideration be given to the overlap between less-favoured areas and areas of high nature value, and to the scope for transforming the related support scheme—which in the UK, is delivered via hill livestock compensatory allowances—into an instrument to maintain and to promote low-input farming. The Government support the Commission's efforts to replace HLCAs, which are production-linked payments, with instruments better designed to deliver environmental benefits. The Government intend to review the existing HLCA scheme with those objectives in mind.

While restructuring is necessary and desirable, it should occur as a result of careful, rational decisions by those concerned. Present circumstances are not conducive to such a process. Producers are under intense pressure, and any restructuring brought about now might not be well founded. Accordingly, there is a strong case for exceptional, one-off help. That will give producers time to prepare for the future, but I must emphasise that those payments are exceptional and one off.

Subject to consultation with the European Commission, I therefore propose to utilise £60 million for the beef sector from the EU compensation available to offset the effects of sterling green rate revaluations; it will be distributed mostly via extra payments for suckler cows. Most of the benefit will go to hill farmers. The payments are 100 per cent. EU funded, although such payments are subject to the Fontainebleau mechanism.

I also propose to increase hill livestock compensatory allowances by £25 million for 1998 only, the increase to be divided equally between beef and sheep. About 25 per cent. of the payments are funded by the EU, but that is also subject to the Fontainebleau mechanism. By any test, £85 million of additional support is substantial.

Let me reiterate the Government's aim for agriculture policy. It is to change fundamentally the narrow producer focus of the present common agriculture policy, to decouple support from production, to work for sustainable farming and to give consumers, taxpayers and the environment greater priority.

I turn now to even more serious matters. As the House knows all too well, BSE has had the gravest human consequences. The scientific data we now have provide convincing evidence that the agent that causes BSE is the same as that which causes the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. That dreadful disease has already cost the lives of more than 20 people, most of them young adults. The Government feel the deepest sympathy with their families. Naturally they want to know how their loved ones came to contract a fatal disease. BSE has also threatened the livelihood of thousands of people throughout the farming and food industries; it has cost the taxpayer huge sums; and it has caused considerable difficulties in our international relations. It has been, literally, a disaster.

The Government agree with those who have been arguing that a national human tragedy of this importance, taken together with the economic and other disruption that has ensued, requires a full, independent assessment. We have a responsibility to the country to take a reasoned look at how circumstances developed in this disastrous manner.

Events since the parliamentary statements on 20 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *716-17*, have been, and continue to be, the subject of extensive political and media attention, and have to some extent obscured the initial chain of developments through which BSE emerged. For all those reasons, the Government have decided to institute an inquiry into the emergence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease. The Government have accordingly asked

Lord Justice Phillips to carry out a non-statutory inquiry into the emergence and identification of BSE and new-variant CJD and the action taken in response to it up to 20 March 1996, and to report within a year. Its terms of reference are:

"To establish and review the history of the emergence and identification of BSE and new-variant CJD in the United Kingdom and of the action taken in response to it up to 20 March 1996; to reach conclusions on the adequacy of that response, taking account of the state of knowledge at the time; and to report on these matters by 31 December 1998 to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland."

I am setting out fuller details of the inquiry in a separate written answer today. Let me emphasise again that the aim is not to reopen old wounds. *[Laughter.]* One would hardly have thought that laughter was appropriate to such a serious matter. Nor is the aim to make party political capital. As I have said, it is to discover the facts, to take a reasoned look at how matters came to pass and to learn the necessary lessons for the future.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written to the Leader of the Opposition inviting his support for the inquiry, and to Lord Callaghan, Baroness Thatcher and the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) about the release of papers of their Administrations to the inquiry.

Following long-standing conventions on access to papers of a previous Administration, present Ministers will play no part in the presentation of evidence by their officials to the inquiry. The Government would, in any case, not expect to comment on the course of the inquiry until we have received Lord Justice Phillips's report. The Government will answer to the House in the normal way for any action following that report.

The Government intend to work closely with the beef industry to resolve its difficulties. The Government also seek the co-operation of all those involved in the circumstances surrounding the emergence of BSE and new-variant CJD to ensure that we learn all the lessons we can from the disaster. We owe it to the families involved, to the public at large and to our future generations. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): May I first thank you, Madam Speaker, for your courtesy in affording us the suspension of the House while we considered the statement that eventually arrived from the Minister? While we all have sympathy for computer problems, we should not forget that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be running the new computerised cattle database.

Given that we have been talking about today's statement for the best part of a week and that British agriculture has been in a state of crisis for much longer than that, I find it quite staggering that the Minister could not have produced the statement before his computers failed. Perhaps he should not have moved them to his sumptuous premises in Smith square.

The first question we must ask ourselves is whether the statement was worth waiting for. For anyone who knows or understands anything about British agriculture, the short answer is an unreserved no. By its third page, the statement has painted a chilling picture for the British beef industry. Does the Minister acknowledge that it is now policy to cut the size of the British beef industry—just when many farmers are scraping and scrimping to stay in it?

The statement says that the Minister wishes to bring forward the rundown of the industry as quickly as possible. Does he agree that, in relation to Europe, he wants us to do it unilaterally? Does he further agree that his proposal to allow the United Kingdom industry to restructure Europe's beef industry is effectively exporting agricultural jobs to mainland Europe? Is not his package of the 90th review—the early retirement scheme—the first example of Labour's work-to-welfare programme?

I was a third of the way through the statement before I found any mention of help for the United Kingdom agricultural sector and beef in particular. It is a travesty for the Minister to tell the House that he is giving £85 million to the beef and sheep industry. At the last agriculture Question Time, the Minister gave me a straightforward no. He said that there would be no more money for agriculture because there was no more money. So where is the money coming from?

The Minister says that he is giving £85 million to the industry. How can that be? Does he agree that, with higher meat hygiene charges of £44 million, the loss in income of the over-30-months scheme of £29 million, the extra expense of £19 million on the cattle passport scheme and the lack of full compensation for the reduced HLCAs of £35 million, he is taking £127 million from the sectors that he claims to be helping? In addition, does he not acknowledge that, during his stewardship of the Ministry, he has had to announce a £1.8 billion fall in receipts to farmers because of the drop in prices? Has he not tried to put before the House a travesty of the true position? Does he agree that the package he has just announced is providing no help to any sector of British agriculture other than sheep and cattle?

Does the Minister accept that many farmers heeded his words in good faith when he said that they should come to the House and lobby in a democratic fashion to put their views? Does he not realise that their hopes were raised as a result of that exercise and that now there will be despair tonight in the farmhouses and the countryside at his announcement? Does that not show that the Government care little for rural Britain?

I now turn to the inquiry that the Minister has announced today. Let me say on behalf of the Opposition that, if it helps to find better ways to protect the public health, we welcome it. Of course we will give the inquiry every assistance. Does the Minister acknowledge, however, that policy to date has been founded on the best scientific advice available, and that £56 million has already been spent on research?

When did the Minister last meet Lord Justice Phillips to discuss the way in which the inquiry will operate? In the light of his almost unbelievable statement that the Government are not out to make political capital out of the matter—he must think that we were born yesterday—will he place in the House of Commons the details of the instructions to Lord Justice Phillips as to the way in which the inquiry is to be conducted?

In his statement, the Minister talked about assessors. Can he tell us who those assessors are? How will they be chosen? Does he accept that the people who may have to provide scientific back-up to the inquiry are the current experts in setting policy in BSE? How much will the

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inquiry cost? Will the Minister assure me that he will provide the necessary practical, scientific, secretarial and financial back-up and support to those past Ministers, officials and others who may be called to give evidence to the inquiry, so that their evidence can be properly given? Will he tell us exactly who in Whitehall will have sight of the documents if it will not be Ministers?

Is not the real reason for the statement the fact that it will provide a public smokescreen for the Minister's failures to help British agriculture? Does the Minister not realise that he has given an open goal to those in Europe who do not want the beef ban lifted? Does he not realise that they will say to him, "If you are so concerned about the handling of the BSE inquiry that you now need a separate inquiry on the matter, we had better wait until the results of that are known before we even consider raising the ban"? He has failed to convince the European standing veterinary committee to impose the specified risk materials ban. His statement is an open goal and a gift to those who would keep the beef ban in place.

Does the Minister realise that the inquiry has been proposed to act as a smokescreen for his inability to enforce the ban on meat coming into this country without SRMs being removed and his total inability to impose his ban on beef on the bone? Does he not realise that the statement and inquiry will give the British beef industry—an industry weakened by his Government's actions—up to two years of uncertainty, and will do nothing to reinforce the messages of confidence that he has been trying to put out about the safety of British beef?

This is a miserable little statement. It has been by a Minister who is exhibiting Scrooge-like tendencies towards British agriculture. It will do nothing to enhance the safety of British beef. Farmers will see it for what it is. He has lost out to the Treasury and failed British agriculture.

Dr. Cunningham: At the end of that long, convoluted series of questions, it is difficult to know exactly what the right hon. Gentleman's position is either on public expenditure or the future of the beef industry—or, indeed, the inquiry itself. He seemed to want it both ways. He is, after all, a right hon. Member who was both a Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and a Treasury Minister when the events were unfolding.

On the right hon. Member's first comment about the crisis in the British beef industry, we all know very well the origins of that crisis. We all know who was in charge in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the crisis developed. It is manifestly absurd to suggest that the problems faced by our beef farmers have all occurred in the past seven months.

As for the right hon. Gentleman's disdainful reference to £85 million-worth of additional expenditure and support for farmers, we shall see whether the farming industry and the rural communities share his view. I will tell him something. How can those former occupants of the Treasury Bench be so disdainful about public expenditure when, with this additional money, we shall be spending on one sector and one product—beef—between £1.4 billion and £1.5 billion in the current financial year? That is a measure of the support for the beef industry.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to my failure—I think he said that is what it was—to take action to prevent beef coming into the country that had not had SRMs removed. That decision will take effect from 1 January. It has been widely welcomed by farmers and *Farmers Weekly*, whose leader column said:

"Dr. Cunningham deserves our support for defending the best interests of UK consumers and farmers."

On the position of the right hon. Gentleman and, for that matter, the shadow Cabinet on the decision on selling beef on the bone, is he aware that his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), a Minister of Agriculture in the Conservative Government, said on the radio that, if he had had the same advice as me, he would have taken the same decision? Is the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) aware that his right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), another member of the shadow Cabinet, said something similar?

What does the right hon. Member for Fylde think about the MAFF press release which says:

"SEAC and the Chief Medical Officer have said that any risk is minuscule. The Government's policy of extreme caution in relation to BSE requires us to ensure that the tissues in which infectivity might potentially occur are removed from the human and animal food chain"?

That is a MAFF press release, put out by his right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), the shadow Leader of the House—another member of the shadow Cabinet—when she was Minister of Agriculture. Who is speaking for the Opposition on safety in food? I take it that, in spite of the chief medical officer's comments that no one should knowingly allow infectivity involving BSE into the human food chain, the right hon. Member for Fylde begs to know better. That is his apparent position.

The right hon. Member dismissed a reference to the possibility of an early retirement scheme for farmers. Why he did that, I do not know. I can tell him that there are plenty of people—and organisations—in agriculture who are interested in sitting down to discuss it with us. That is another thing about which he and his colleagues did absolutely nothing during 18 years of government.

The right hon. Member began by saying that he would support the inquiry into BSE and new-variant CJD, and then went on to disparage it at length, saying that, among other things, it would deter people in Europe from lifting the beef ban. He has not a shred of evidence for saying that, of course—not a scintilla. We have made much more progress in dealing with our colleagues in Europe than he and his colleagues ever did, and we shall continue to do so.

As for the right hon. Member's remarks about political bias, does he really expect us to believe that Lord Justice Phillips would accept the appointment of conducting this important inquiry in the public interest on anything other than totally independent grounds?

Mr. Jack: Give us some details.

Dr. Cunningham: I have given more details this afternoon in a written answer. I have given the terms of reference in my statement. There will be two special assessors—one for scientific matters and one for administration. We shall discuss their appointment with

Lord Justice Phillips before announcing their names. The reality is that, if the Opposition had nothing to hide, they would welcome an inquiry into the issues, as I believe the public will.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Will the Minister acknowledge—given the financial context of his statement and the fact that the Liberal Democrats have been critical of the Labour party before, during and since the election for its unwillingness to break the Conservative constraints set by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer—that the farming industry will be totally bemused to hear the Conservatives, of all people, complaining that their constraints have been broken? After all, the Conservatives have previously demanded that those constraints be broken in the context of supporting the beef industry.

Taken together with the fact that the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman spent longer talking about the inquiry than he did about the details of the package, the Conservatives' reaction tells us all we need to know about their credibility and priorities. That is the parliamentary and political point.

Will the Minister also acknowledge that some decisions relevant to the beef sector of the industry are entirely the remit of his Administration, not least the changes to the over-30-months scheme and the additional costs that will be imposed next year by passports and the like? Given the total package, in the context of green pound revaluation and the horrendous difficulties that the strength of sterling is causing, large sections of the agricultural community will reach the political and practical conclusion that—try though he has—his proposals will be too little, too late for many of our hill farmers and rural communities.

On the question of the Commission and the second part of the Minister's statement, I seek further reassurance about the political attitudes at Brussels level. Some people at that level will take any opportunity they can to hold back further progress in the lifting of the beef ban. Has the Minister discussed with the Commission the terms or the timetable of the committee of inquiry in advance of his statement today? Without doubt, some of our past problems with Brussels have been because announcements have been made here, and the first that the Commission has heard of them was over the news tapes and not directly from Ministers.

I make a final general plea to the Minister. Will he recognise that we cannot restructure in isolation or without due regard to the longer-term aims of Agenda 2000 and the reform of the common agricultural policy? He has rightly identified the need for greater emphasis on conservation and countryside management generally. Will he also recognise that the most fundamental requirement to make that a reality is the people of the countryside? If the net effect of the statement is that more of the sons and daughters of smaller-scale, less well-heeled family farmers do not anticipate being able to follow their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers in the rural communities that they have served so well, that will negate and make impossible the very priority that the Minister and the EU Commissioner have set out for CAP reform. The crisis of morale will remain, despite the statement, and we will have to return to some of those issues, as a matter of urgency, in the new year.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for a more measured and more informed contribution than that from the right hon. Member for Fylde. The hon. Gentleman pointed out that the right hon. Gentleman spent longer trying to damn the inquiry than referring to the situation of the beef industry; that proves that he did not have a lot to say.

I am aware that costs that will be introduced at the beginning of the next financial year will have a significant impact on the industry, but we must face the reality that we cannot go on simply using more and more taxpayers' money in the way that we have done. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the reluctance of some young people to follow their parents into farming. I see that among hill farmers in my constituency.

It is principally because—as has been evidenced in the 28 years that I have represented them—their position in the farming income league table has not changed. Hill farmers were at the bottom of the league when I was elected to the House almost 28 years ago, and they are still there. The inescapable conclusion is that the policies that have been followed have not made it easier, more profitable or more economically advantageous to pursue hill farming. That is why young people choose other and better careers for themselves.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned agri-monetary compensation. If I had taken advantage of the total agri-monetary compensation available to the Government for the beef sector, it would have amounted to £77 million. The package that I have announced exceeds that figure, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He said that the package is too little, too late. Time will be the judge of that. My guess is that most reasonable people in agriculture will welcome the statement as representing significant help for them.

As for the hon. Gentleman's question about the views of Brussels, I share his concern that the political attitudes of some people—and not veterinary or medical science, or the manifest safety of British beef—have led to the decisions that have been made. As I have said many times, that is unacceptable to the Government, and it was for that reason, among others, that I made it clear to my colleagues last week that I was not prepared to delay any further the introduction of the specified risk materials controls on imports of beef to this country. For those reasons, and because of our consistent pressure, I hope and expect that the Commission will produce a proposal in January, to be considered in Brussels, for the partial lifting of the ban.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Will my right hon. Friend agree that farmers in less-favoured areas, especially in Wales, will be helped greatly by his announcement? Will he also confirm that he will press his European partners to ensure that the ban on British beef will be lifted in the near future, because that is the real answer for our farming industry in the long term?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is absurd for the Conservative party to pretend that giving an industrial sector such as the beef sector another £85 million will somehow damage its interests or will not be generally welcomed by people in the industry. *[Interruption.]* We hear it again: too little, too late. We are proposing to give the beef industry more money in this financial year than the previous Conservative Government did. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Fylde

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says from a sedentary position, "Less than you have taken away." That is also wrong, because most of the announcements that we have made will not take effect until the beginning of the next financial year. I can promise my hon. Friend's constituents, and farmers generally, that we shall continue to work assiduously and constructively with our European colleagues for a lifting of the ban.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): May I welcome the Minister's statement in relation to the BSE inquiry, but seek his reassurance that the inquiry will not be a further obstacle to the lifting of the beef ban during the deliberations that take place over the next 12 months?

Secondly, the Minister has made clear the Government's commitment to some form of decommissioning scheme and restructuring within the beef sector. The details he has given so far have a rather indiscriminate feel about them. What reassurance can he give to quality sectors of the market—such as the Scottish quality beef herds—that they will be protected from an indiscriminate cut in production?

Finally, does the right hon. Gentleman understand that there are declining incomes and revenues in almost all sectors of the farming industry, and that the assistance is targeted at a proportion of the industry? There will still be enormous unease in areas of the farming industry where incomes have substantially fallen in recent months and years, as there is nothing on offer in the package today.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his supportive comments about the decision to institute a public inquiry, and I am sure that that decision will be widely welcomed.

I emphasise that we want to have a dialogue with the industry about an early retirement scheme, which will be voluntary—after all, we cannot make it compulsory. Britain has never taken advantage of the European Union availability of early retirement schemes. Ten of our partner countries have such schemes; we and four others do not. Rather like their failure to make an early start on the decommissioning of fishing vessels—which they should have done, and could have done, but failed to do—the previous Administration failed to take any action on providing an early retirement scheme for farmers. I want to have a dialogue about that with farmers. If we can agree the general outline of a scheme and have it approved by Brussels, it will be available—but, I emphasise, on a voluntary basis.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about other sectors of the farming industry. We have said from the outset that we recognised that the problems were most severe in the beef sector and that if we were to produce additional resources, we would target them at that sector. That is what we have done.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is the Minister aware that the families of those people—young people, in the main—who died from the new-variant CJD will be pleased with the announcement of the inquiry today? When I see Opposition Members laughing at that announcement—I have a constituent who died from CJD—I think that they have their priorities wrong. The inquiry will be public, and we need to get to the truth. Will the inquiry have the power to subpoena witnesses?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that his prediction is right, and that the families—and people well beyond the families—who have lost loved ones as a result of a cruel degenerative disease for which there is no cure will welcome the decision.

The answer to my hon. Friend's question on the subpoenaing of witnesses is no. This will be a non-statutory inquiry, rather similar to the Scott inquiry in that regard. As then, the Government will watch the proceedings carefully. We will take advice from Lord Justice Phillips, and if he believes that some extra powers are needed, we will be ready to consider them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On the question of the inquiry, does the Minister accept that I and those of my colleagues who had ministerial responsibility look forward to the report of the inquiry, believing as we do that—at least for the most part—all the necessary decisions were fully and promptly taken? Does he further accept the real anxiety that the mere fact of holding the inquiry will make the lifting of the ban more difficult to obtain?

On the question of compensation, does the right hon. Gentleman understand the anxiety in the farming industry as to the modesty of this package? Will he accept that there will be considerable concern at what he has said about restructuring, which, in effect, amounts to a reduction in UK production capacity which is not matched by a reduction in capacities in the EU? Does he also accept that there will be concern that he has not done the things that lay particularly within his competence—to reduce, at least in part, the charges he has imposed, and to lift the weight cap on the over-30-months scheme?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his comments about the inquiry. He referred to the modesty of the package. We live in strange times when £85 million of additional taxpayers' money is described as modest. His comment reflects on the colossal sums and the scale of the finance currently going into the beef sector. Set beside the £1.4 billion provided for the beef sector, most people would say that £85 million was modest. However, set beside the calls on the Government's public expenditure and the need for constraint—and compared with the level of support given to other industrial sectors—£85 million remains a substantial sum. People outside will be astonished to hear the Conservative party saying that it thinks that £85 million of their money can be produced just like that and dismissed as not sufficient, as he and his right hon. and hon. Friends have dismissed it.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about restructuring. It is not the Government's position that we want to see the restructuring of only the UK beef sector. We have made it clear consistently that we want an urgent restructuring of the beef sector in Europe as a whole. One consequence of the ban is that Britain is taking far more of its share of the burden of beef; the over-30-months scheme and the calf processing scheme are clear examples of that. We want to see the beef sector in Europe as a whole restructured. I thought that the Conservative party supported the proposals for reform in Agenda 2000. I thought that that was Tory party policy; it is certainly the policy of the National Farmers Union.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, which will be welcomed in

many rural communities, not only because of the additional finance for the industry but because of the establishment of the inquiry.

Earlier today in my constituency, a local meat packing company—Lockerbie Meat Packers—announced that it was to go into receivership with the immediate loss of some 71 jobs, with another 24 jobs in jeopardy. I sincerely hope that it is my right hon. Friend's long-term aim to remove the ban on beef exports. It is somewhat ironic that, only last month, this Government sat with other EU states at a summit to discuss the importance of jobs within the EU. I hope that my right hon. Friend will push as hard as possible to ensure that the ban is lifted.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right to draw attention to the continuing consequences of the ban on the exports of British beef. Sadly, he has experienced some of those consequences in his constituency, and I very much share his sorrow that people are losing their jobs. That is exactly why it is important for us to have constructive and open dialogue with our European colleagues about the nature of our rigorous approach to safeguarding British beef and the strength of our case for lifting the ban. If our European colleagues and partners had any idea that we were withholding information, that would be far more likely to prevent us from getting the ban lifted than our open and constructive attitude to all the issues.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the Minister understand the sheer despair of farmers at the frozen immobility of the Government in the past two months, which has made the incomes crisis worse? Does he realise that he already has an early redundancy scheme—it is known as bankruptcy? Does he acknowledge the sheer haemorrhage of farmers of all sorts off the land, particularly in areas such as his constituency and mine where they are essential to its upkeep? When he next talks about environmental improvements and the role of the environment, will he add that farmers are necessary for the environment?

Dr. Cunningham: I am not sure what the right hon. Gentleman's question was—if, indeed, he asked one at all. Yes, I understand what is going on in those areas, as he does, because we represent similar constituencies and he spoke at the Dispatch Box as an Agriculture Minister, with some success.

I do not dispute it when the right hon. Gentleman says that there is a crisis, but I dispute the fact that the crisis has arisen only since 1 May. Being a reasonable man, he must know that the problems, particularly those faced by beef farmers, are very long-standing and deep-seated. The crisis has been gathering momentum for some years. Sadly, the end of it is not in sight. That is the reality of where we are, and I can tell the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends, as well as the farmers, that the way out of the crisis is not simply by throwing more and more public money at it. There have to be better ways than that.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement and the two aspects that he has dwelt on, may I ask for an assurance? One thing that all farmers are asking for from 1 January is effective labelling of all foreign imports and, more particularly, some dealings not merely with supermarkets, which we understand have their own difficulties but are coming into order, but with the catering industry, so that it plays fair and there is a level playing field.

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I continue to work for the level playing field that my hon. Friend asks for on behalf of farmers. I know that they want that, and that is the reason for the implementation of the specified risk materials decision from 1 January. That is also why the previous Administration rightly took action to ban imports of over-30-months beef. Farmers keep telling us that they believe that over-30-months beef is coming into Britain, but we have no evidence of that. If they have tangible evidence, we will immediately take action to prosecute the people involved. As for a beef labelling scheme, we expect to have such a scheme in place by the spring of next year.

Finally, next year we will also be publishing for the first time the hygiene assessment scores of abattoirs and meat cutting plants so that everyone—consumers, butchers and wholesalers—will know exactly the quality of hygiene provision in our plants. That, too, should give British beef a positive boost.

I emphasise that British beef is the safest beef produced anywhere in Europe. We continue to take action to ensure that that is so, and I would encourage anyone who buys beef, either as an individual consumer or an organisation, to try wherever and whenever possible to buy British beef.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): May I seek clarification from the Minister on one point? In an earlier answer, he said that about £77 million was available for the beef sector in agri-monetary compensation. In evidence to the Select Committee on Agriculture, he said that £980 million was available in total across all four agricultural sectors for compensation. Can he say how that breaks down among the four sectors?

Why did the Minister's list of objectives for the reform of the common agricultural policy omit any reference to creating a competitive UK agriculture industry? Does he understand that that fuels suspicions among the farming community that he is happy to see a disproportionate amount of the burden from restructuring falling on the British beef producer rather than throughout Europe as a whole?

Finally, what assurances has the right hon. Gentleman sought from the European Commission and from other member states that they will not use the inquiry as an excuse to delay any aspect of the lifting of the beef export ban?

Dr. Cunningham: There is no answer to the final question because, as the hon. Gentleman knows and as I said earlier, I suspect that some people are more motivated by political or economic considerations than by considerations of human health or veterinary science. We continue to resist that approach wherever and whenever possible.

The hon. Gentleman began by asking me about the total available for agri-monetary compensation. He is right. The total is £980 million. Of course, that would be spread over three years, and up to half of it would have to come from the United Kingdom alone, but 50 per cent. could qualify for some EU support. Within that total and those

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restrictions, the total available at present in support for the beef sector is £77 million. I should be happy to come back to his Select Committee to go into that in greater detail, as I understand that it is to investigate the matter.

I said in my statement—the right hon. Member for Fylde questioned this—that we had to have economically as well as environmentally sustainable agriculture. That is one of our objectives, again not merely for the United Kingdom but for reform of the CAP. Those words were contained in the final declaration from the Council of Agriculture Ministers which went to the European summit in Luxembourg. Now we are awaiting specific, detailed proposals to give effect to the legislative changes that we anticipate from Commissioner Fischler in the beef sector, in the dairy sector—I still hope—and in the cereals sector, too.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The statement has been running for nearly an hour and there are many hon. Members on their feet. I shall let it run for a little longer, but I appeal to hon. Members for brisk questions, and I think that the Minister will oblige with brisk answers. We must get through as quickly as possible.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): In the absence of a Welsh Office statement—I understand the reason for that—may I ask my right hon. Friend about the implications for my constituency, our beef farmers and the amounts of money involved?

I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to have a public inquiry. May I tell him about Miss Vicky Rimmer, a young woman who fell victim to a CJD or CJD-type disease, and who died only last month? Her family will welcome his decision to have an inquiry.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the decision to hold an inquiry. I was making the statement on behalf of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland. I think—I am speaking from memory here—that Wales will benefit by about 25 per cent. of the hill livestock compensatory allowance and about 10 per cent. of the agri-monetary compensation; Welsh farmers will benefit considerably from the statement.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The Minister said that everyone knew the cause of BSE. Will he confirm that he will not rule out Lord Justice Phillips's investigation into alternative possible causes that might be advanced? Does he recognise that the test of his statement will be whether it gives confidence again to the industry, which is facing a very serious crisis? He rightly said that he is not responsible for many of the background problems that affect the beef industry, but what is different under his Administration is the continuing and sustained level of the pound. There have been five increases in interest rates in the past six months and there are reports that because of increasing wage rates there is likely to be a further increase in interest rates. Does he recognise that that is a particularly grave problem at present and that it is affecting all markets? Against that background, does he recognise that, sadly, it does not look as though his statement will give the confidence that is needed?

Dr. Cunningham: I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. I did not say that we knew the cause of BSE; I said that we knew that there was a direct link between BSE and the new variant of CJD. There is scientific evidence for that. Of course it will be for Lord Justice Phillips to decide who should give evidence and the way in which it should be taken. That procedure is entirely a matter for him, and neither I nor any of my ministerial colleagues will intervene in that in any way, as I made clear in my statement and I am happy to make clear again to the right hon. Gentleman and the House.

I accept the point about the test of time being what happens in the market. This morning, I was unhappy to learn when listening to "Farming Today", as no doubt were many right hon. and hon. Members, of the collapse in lamb prices, for example, and of the reality that we are producing more lamb than the market can take. I listened with care to Robert Forster giving the reasons. It is about consumer choice, not only here but abroad. That is another important factor.

Questions about the strength of sterling and interest rate policy are more properly addressed to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the inquiry consider the work of Harash Narang, who was developing a live test for BSE when the resources were taken away by the previous Government? If that research had been successful, it could have saved the country millions, indeed billions, of pounds.

Dr. Cunningham: I have been in correspondence with Dr. Narang, and the Ministry is co-operating with him in a collaborative venture. I can respond as I did to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King): if Dr. Narang wants to give evidence to the inquiry, he should approach Lord Justice Phillips in the normal way. The address of the inquiry secretariat is published in the written answer that I have given today.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): I welcome the crumbs that have fallen to the farmers from the Exchequer's table, but does the Minister recognise that a section of the farming industry, the beef finishers, will not be directly affected by the money? They are the most severely affected people; does he intend to let them go to the wall? What effect will the package have in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Cunningham: Beef finishers should be among the people who benefit from the low cost of cattle in the market. We have directed this assistance—the hon. Gentleman called it crumbs, but he may wish to reconsider, as £85 million is hardly crumbs—to the primary beef producers, and it will benefit them significantly.

Farmers in Northern Ireland will benefit, although I am sorry that I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman by exactly how much; perhaps I can drop him a note about that.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I welcome my right hon. Friend's

statement and particularly the way in which he has managed to target the help towards those sectors that need it most. Will he confirm that farmers in Wales will receive approximately £12 million as a result of his announcement? When can farmers expect to receive that additional help? As he knows, they face very severe financial circumstances. Does he intend to enforce rigorously the controls on imported EU beef and to ensure that they are applied not only at the ports but at the packing plants where much of the processing is done?

Dr. Cunningham: I think that my hon. Friend is right, and that farmers in Wales will benefit by about £12 million. That is based on calculations on the back of an envelope, and I hope that no one will nail my hide to the wall on the figure if it is slightly out. No doubt hon. Members think that they have better reasons for doing that in any case.

When will the money be paid? As soon as is administratively possible, consistent with getting my decision approved by the Commission in Brussels. My hon. Friend asked whether we would be rigorous about enforcing the controls; the answer is yes. Indeed, we now insist that the controls be exercised before any meat arrives in the UK in the first place.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Has the Minister had an opportunity to consider the longer-term effect on those who look after livestock on the uplands and in the less-favoured areas? He has announced £25 million for them today, but he will know that, if they go out of business or take early retirement, that will have a considerable effect on both the rural economy and the local environment in sparsely populated areas. It is only the keeping of livestock and the careful grazing of them on the uplands that maintains the British countryside in its present state. If he has not done that exercise, will he do so urgently?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Lady makes an important point, and we have indeed considered that. She is right to say that hill livestock compensatory allowances are targeted particularly on those in the less-favoured areas. It is also important to recognise that the total of £60 million in agri-monetary compensation is targeted at suckler herds, so some will go to people farming in the upland areas.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I have in my hand an article from March 1989—nearly nine years ago—in which I warned of the danger of the infective agent jumping species from cattle to humans; at that time, the Conservative party accused me of scaremongering. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the factors that contributed to the lack of trust in British beef in Europe was the previous Government's lack of candour and openness, and that the decision to hold an open inquiry will help to rebuild the confidence in British beef that we all want?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The important thing in all such matters is to be absolutely candid and transparent about the problems that we face and how we are to resolve them. The Government are determined to eradicate BSE completely from the national herd. The House, and the United Kingdom as a whole, have nothing to fear from an inquiry into these events in the terms in which we have set it up. We are more open and more candid about these matters than anyone else; it is important that we should remain so, because that is the basis of the strength of our case.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Given that the Minister has decided to channel this wholly inadequate help to the beleaguered beef farmers through the medium of the HLCAs and the suckler cow premium scheme, can he assure the House that the premium will now be brought up to the maximum permitted by the European Union; and if not, why not?

Dr. Cunningham: That is just a simple demand for more money, and it comes ill from the hon. Gentleman, who, when he was on the Government Benches, used always to be critical of public expenditure.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement; for the extra money that is now due to Wales; and for his action since 1 January on a level playing field and on labelling? Can he assure us that the inquiry into the BSE crisis will include an inquiry into the payments made to date to farmers, because there is grave concern in my constituency that much of the money that has been put into the industry has found its way not into farmers' pockets but into those of middlemen?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I think that the final part of his question goes beyond the terms of reference of the inquiry to be held by Lord Justice Phillips.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does the Minister not accept that the £25 million that he has announced in HLCA additions would have had more impact if he had announced it to the House two months ago, in the normal course of events, and if the Government had not decided not to pay the £60 million suckler cow addition that the previous Government paid at this time last year? Because of the procrastination, with the Minister going round cap in hand to the Treasury, confidence has been eroded. It is all very well for him to say that he wants to support the British beef industry, but his decision to wind down the industry has caused more and more British beef farmers to go out of production. We will have a smaller effort in beef, and more will be imported.

Dr. Cunningham: I accept none of that. The hon. Gentleman well knows that his party, when in government, made no provision whatever for the continuation the following year of the special one-off payment of £60 million. The fact is that I am providing £85 million; in case he cannot work it out, that is £25 million more.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Has not BSE been our most poisonous inheritance from the Conservative Government? I return to a point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) about those who attend at the non-statutory inquiry presided over by Lord Justice Phillips. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that there will be no impediment to civil servants attending? He mentioned former Prime Ministers. Is it simply a matter of courtesy to ask them to open up

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

the papers relating to their Administrations, or do the Government need their permission to gain full access to all official papers?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments and I am happy to tell him that we will place no impediment in the path of anyone. Civil servants from all Departments will co-operate fully with the inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written, as a matter of courtesy, to former Prime Ministers in the period concerned. Papers will be available. Current Ministers will have no involvement in the preparation or provision of those papers, or in giving evidence at the inquiry.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Liberal Democrat Members warmly welcome the judicial inquiry, having pressed for it for 12 months without reaction from the previous Government. Does not the inquiry have two purposes? First, it must learn from mistakes so that we can avoid repetition of what the Minister correctly described as total disaster. Is it not ironic that local government councillors and officers who make drastic mistakes can be surcharged but Ministers escape scot free? Is not the second purpose to ensure that everyone in this country, in Brussels and on the continent knows that there will be no further cover-up, and that we can be assured that British beef, in the Minister's words, is truly not only the safest in the world but demonstrably the safest?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his measured and constructive response. Yes, the principal purpose is to learn from the mistakes that were made—probably genuinely. We must learn the lessons of what has been a human tragedy and a financial disaster. It has been a disaster for everyone associated with our beef industry.

On personal surcharge, the proper view—I had better say that it is my personal view—is that it is inappropriate for people in elected office at any level to be liable to personal surcharge. I have always thought that; I am on the record on that. The people in current difficulties must face the consequences of the law the way it is.

It is important that it is demonstrable beyond any doubt that we have disclosed everything and have not been involved in the withholding of any advice, information or scientific knowledge about how these disastrous events developed. I believe that an inquiry is a further clear demonstration of our commitment to that approach.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement on the inquiry into BSE and the support for the suckler cow sector, which will benefit farmers in my constituency? Frustration will continue among those farmers when they see imported beef from countries such as Namibia and Botswana being sold in British supermarkets under misleading labels. If it is possible for consumers to know the country of origin of every bottle of wine that they buy, could they not know the country of origin of every joint of meat?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome for my statement, respect both in of the inquiry and of the considerable support for beef farmers. We will introduce a beef labelling scheme from spring next year. While we cannot discriminate against lawful trade—I emphasise that we have legal obligations—it is nevertheless my experience that consumers want to know more and more about the provenance of the food they buy, whether it is animal or vegetable products. We are pressing ahead on that basis. We will encourage supermarkets and food chains to do the same, so that people have all the knowledge that they need about the origin of the food and food products that they buy.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the tragedy of the west country in the figures published by Exeter university on the reduction of income—a fall of 85 per cent. for lowland livestock and of 59 per cent. for specialist areas? It goes on with every sector. Does he understand the feeling in the west country that the ban on beef on the bone is a coup de grace? His medical advisers stated that there was a million to one chance of infection. With that information, why cannot the consumer choose whether he wants his Sunday joint to be on the bone or not? Why should we nanny the consumer? We do not do it with cigarette smoking; why should we do it with beef?

Dr. Cunningham: I try very hard to understand the problems faced by beef producers. We shall go on doing so. The actions that I have described today and others that I have taken are all aimed at helping our beef industry. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food published its own agreed analysis of farm incomes on 1 December. The right hon. Gentleman can examine a copy in the Library. I think that the figures are different from the Exeter university ones, which I have not seen. They show very serious falls in income. There is no dispute on that general point.

As for what the right hon. Gentleman said about taking beef off the bone, my wife did a little research with our family butcher this week. He said that he sold six or seven T-bones a week. We are talking about 5 per cent. of beef; 95 per cent. is already sold off the bone. Nothing in what I have decided is going to harm anyone. Let me remind him of the views of the chief medical officer and of the shadow Leader of the House when she was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The CMO serves me, as well as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, and said:

"It would be matter of grave concern if any tissues that have been shown to transmit BSE were knowingly allowed to remain in the human food chain. This is a real risk, not a theoretical risk."

In June 1994, the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) said that she had to act with

"extreme caution in relation to BSE . . . to ensure that the tissues in which infectivity might potentially occur are removed from the human . . . food chain."—[*Official Report*, 30 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. *654*.]

That was the position of the Government supported by the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery). Our position is the same.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): Will the Minister note that in many European countries, the early retirement scheme is linked to a scheme for encouraging young entrants to the industry so that it becomes not only

a restructuring but a revitalising process? If he would consider that, I think that there would be some appreciation of the scheme's introduction.

The Minister has made a great deal of environmental sustainability, but is not the production of beef from grass a model of environmental sustainability compared with the intensive production systems that bring us our poultry meat and much of our pig meat? Is it not time to consider the whole meat sector?

I welcome the Minister's remarks on imports, but would it not be appropriate for the Government to institute a comprehensive investigation—an inquiry, indeed—into imports so that people's minds can be put to rest and they can really understand what is going on and what might be done about it?

Dr. Cunningham: I repeat that the proposal on the early retirement scheme is for discussion; it has not been decided yet. We must try to agree a scheme, first, with farmers and their representatives and, then, with the Commission in Brussels. I am willing to listen to all the arguments about what should be in such a scheme.

I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman about the extensive production of beef and low-input farming, to which I referred in my statement.

As for imports, I believe that we now have the strongest checks and safeguards on imports of beef of any European country. There is always room for improvement, and if I can see practical ways in which to introduce better safeguards, I will consider them. As I have already said, however, it was the previous Administration who made it illegal to import over-30-months beef into Britain. We have built on that approach, and we are now looking at stringent safeguards on all beef imported into this country. If there are others things that we can do which would not fall foul of our obligations in the European Union, I would be willing to consider them.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): In the first half of the Minister's statement, he described the plight of British farmers, and his solution was partly to allow for the structural reform of the industry so that more and more farmers will disappear. He then went on to describe the inquiry process and linked that section of his statement with his comments on structural reform by saying that the inquiry is "even more serious" than that reform. Would he not agree that there is nothing more serious than the plight of British farmers at the moment? The British farmer has always provided the backbone of British society, but the Government are setting out to remove it.

Dr. Cunningham: On reflection, the hon. Gentleman may regret that intervention. I said that that inquiry is more serious because CJD has cost the lives of more than 20 young people.

Mr. Gray: Twenty-five farmers have committed suicide.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is not doing his own or his party's case any good by persisting with that. Many more people may die as a consequences of that awful disease, and we need to treat that threat extremely seriously. That is what the Government are doing. I am sorry that we cannot carry the hon. Gentleman and his party with us.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can the Phillips inquiry be prevailed on to find out why the previous Government refused for four consecutive years to invest in a cattle identification scheme—an animal tracking centre—which was critical in the Florence agreement and is one of the principal measures that would ensure the lifting of the beef ban?

Dr. Cunningham: I emphasise that the inquiry to be conducted by Lord Justice Phillips will be politically impartial. The nature of the proceedings will be determined by him. As for my hon. Friend's comments about a cattle traceability scheme, in that and other regards I agree that the previous Administration's approach was woefully inadequate and slow, as was their approach to the selective cull. I am pleased to say that the cattle traceability scheme will be located in my hon. Friend's constituency of Workington. It will create more than 260 jobs and it will be operational in the early part of next year.

In respect of the selective cull, when we took over, the previous Administration had identified and culled 2,000 cattle. In the seven months that we have been in government, we have increased that total to more than 50,000. That represents the difference in approach.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Last week, I tabled a priority written question asking how much the United Kingdom had saved since the Fontainebleau agreement in payments to the European Union. As is the custom with the Government, that priority question has not been answered, but I understand that the figure is about £21.5 billion. That money was saved, at least in part, at the expense of the farmers' insurance policy under the agri-monetary compensation scheme. Instead of giving farmers 10 per cent. of what is, in fact, their own money, why does the Minister not give them what they need—5 per cent. of what we have saved?

Dr. Cunningham: That is just another plea for more and more public expenditure, with no account taken of how that money would be provided. What the hon. Gentleman says is patently absurd.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Can the Minister assure the House that the £85 million to which he has referred is entirely additional to his Department's existing public expenditure survey line and that there will be no parallel reductions in his PES line elsewhere either in this year or in future years?

Dr. Cunningham: This is additional funding.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Given the catastrophic fall in farm incomes, which the Minister has accepted, and the fact that, as the Minister would agree, most farmers are concerned not so much with global amounts as with how much is available to them at their farm gate to get them through the next year, has he conducted any research on how much money, on average, will be available to individual lowland beef farmers, given that most of his support will go to hill farmers?

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

If the right hon. Gentleman is unable to answer that question today, will he accept that many might well come to conclusion that the sum for each individual farm will be very modest indeed?

Dr. Cunningham: Speaking from memory, I think that the answer is about 30 per cent. The hon. Gentleman must bear in mind the fact that a significant proportion of the aid will go to those with suckler herds in the lowlands as well as in less-favoured areas.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is the Minister able to understand why my farmers in Ribble Valley will be very angry at his statement? In one part of that statement, he said that farmers will get a one-off payment of £85 million, but, next year, they will face lifetime extra costs that will exceed that amount. Does he understand that, next year, they will face increased costs for which that money will not compensate? Does he appreciate that all the farming industry has been hit sideways, including the ancillary industries that rely on farming? The rural economy has had the wind knocked out of its sails because of his announcement today. The bleak prospect in 1998 is of many farmers going out of business involuntarily because the banks will call in their loans.

Dr. Cunningham: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman apparently takes no account of the fact that the problems with the rural communities and the rural economy, as well with agriculture, are in large measure due to the 18 years of Conservative rule. That was made manifest by the electors on 1 May when they drove out Conservative Members of Parliament from so many rural areas because they believed that those Members' policies had failed them.

What I understand about beef, agriculture or any industry in the United Kingdom economy is that, if it can be sustained only by more and more subsidy, it has no long-term prospect of viability. That is not the way forward.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the Minister share with me the disappointment of my constituency farmers, especially beef farmers in the south-eastern quarter of Leicestershire, that, although until now he had done nothing to apply to Europe for agri-monetary compensation—today we have been offered just a small proportion of the total available—up until now our farmers have had to pay through their own taxation for the agri-monetary compensation paid to the farmers of other European Union countries? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us why he has applied for such a little amount on this occasion?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes. I have already said that a total of £77 million was available for the beef sector. I am applying for £60 million of it, added to which will be £25 million of hill livestock compensatory allowances. The hon. and learned Gentleman asked why we, as taxpayers, contribute to the funding of the European Union. The answer is that we are members of it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. That is the end of the statement. We must get back to the main business. I call—

Mr. Evans: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have already made my views known about the enormous cost of calling Parliament—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked a lengthy question on the statement and I hope that he is not trying to extend the time given to it. It went on for an hour and a half and many of his colleagues have been disappointed because I was unable to call them. I hope that his point of order is one with which I can deal.

Mr. Evans: Yes. I hope so. The House of Commons is sitting for one day this week, obviously at an enormous cost—perhaps £50,000 in Members' travelling expenses for calling them back. A large amount of fresh food has been brought into the House today which may not be put to use in the next two weeks. Will you use your good guidance to ensure that no food is thrown away and that any left over is given to hostels for the homeless or other people?

Madam Speaker: That was barely a point of order for me. We have a superb organisation in the House, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it has not brought in too much food.

School Standards and Framework Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

6.29 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Madam Deputy Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "Madam Speaker."] Sorry, Madam Speaker—I do apologise. It is so nice to see you in the Chamber at this stage in a debate.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not being very helpful to himself; I think that he had better start again and get it right.

Mr. Foster: I am most grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to wish you a very happy Christmas.

I should like to make it absolutely clear that we shall be voting with the Government this evening to give the Bill a Second Reading. We believe that it is an important Bill that contains many important and exciting ideas that will be responsible for levering up standards in our schools; they are ideas that deserve our full support. Just as I congratulate the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what I suppose, in "Yes, Minister" terminology, may be described as his brave and outspoken attack on those who seek to erode support for the disabled, I also congratulate him on introducing the Bill.

However, in supporting the Bill's Second Reading, I hope that my action will not be interpreted as uncritical acceptance of all aspects of the Bill as currently drafted. While we enthusiastically endorse some, indeed many, of the proposals, we believe that others are misguided or, at least, in need of significant revision in Committee. A few of the proposals, not least those in relation to the proposed framework for schools, are downright harmful to the education service and should be dropped altogether.

In summary, perhaps we could describe the Bill as the good, the bad and the ugly. I am sure that the Secretary of State will understand if I concentrate this evening on those aspects of the Bill about which we have concerns. But in doing so, I would not want to obscure our genuine delight in the Bill's overall tone, its emphasis on partnership and co-operation and its plans to reduce class size, introduce baseline assessment, establish education action zones, give local education authorities a statutory role in raising standards in their schools and, particularly, ensure once and for all that we have seen the back of nursery vouchers, which are to be replaced with sensible plans to expand the provision of high-quality early years education.

Before I turn to some specific proposals, there is one general point of concern on which I wish to touch. Both Liberal Democrats and the Labour party vociferously complained about the way in which, under the Conservatives, each successive Education Act further increased the power of the Secretary of State, who was given nearly 500 additional powers in the Education Reform Act 1988 alone. It is therefore somewhat of a surprise to discover that, once in office, the Labour party is continuing the trend; for this Bill is also a centralising Bill. It contains numerous clauses under which the Secretary of State is to issue regulations, guidance or codes of conduct. I have not had the opportunity to carry out a full analysis, but on my current estimate, the Secretary of State's additional powers range between 70 and 100.

The Liberal Democrats believe that it is the job of central Government to establish the framework and provide the resources, then to allow those on the ground—not least the professional teachers—to get on with the job. Of course, to do so they need additional resources—the tools to do the job, including books, equipment and decent buildings in which to work. In that sense, I agreed with the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), when he called for more money, although he has a huge cheek to do so. He must be suffering from chronic amnesia, for he has forgotten that, over 18 years, the Conservative Government starved our schools of resources. One thing that those on the ground do not need is what the Secretary of State's senior adviser, Mr. Michael Barber, recently recommended, when he talked of the

"unrelenting pressure from the centre".

I shall now turn to some specific aspects of the Bill. In doing so, I shall inevitably have to omit some points that I should like to have raised in detail, had I had more time. My questions include: why are the Government so keen to reintroduce nutritional standards for schools, but have not yet taken the opportunity to reintroduce minimum space standards for schools? Why have they not sought a more sensible approach to accountability arrangements for governing bodies? Why are they continuing with the system of the annual governors' meeting for parents, with a handful of governors meeting late on a wet Thursday night and sitting on undersized chairs? Why have they not sought a more sensible approach? Why have they rightly added a clause to prohibit corporal punishment on pupils for whom nursery education is provided or supported by the LEA, but failed to extend that ban to cover pupils in privately run nursery provision? In particular, why have they not used the Bill as an opportunity to overturn the damaging effects of the Greenwich judgment on school admission policies?

We fully support the plans to reintroduce maximum class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds—a measure that will reverse a decision made by a previous Labour Government. We nevertheless believe that the plans could be more ambitious. We must remember that there are 480,000 five, six and seven-year-olds in classes of more than 30, but there are about 780,000 older primary pupils who suffer from the same problem and whose education is similarly damaged. Surely, therefore, we should be seeking to reduce class sizes for all primary school pupils—infant and junior. We shall be seeking to move an amendment to that effect.

We recognise the costs and other implications of what we seek to achieve. I do not believe that the Government have fully appreciated the implications of their own proposals. There are three specific problems. First, insufficient money will be released from the abandonment of the assisted places scheme to pay for the large number of additional teachers and classrooms required. I have seen the Government's cost implications and estimates in the financial memorandum to the Bill, and I believe that they are whistling in the dark.

Secondly, it is by no means clear that, even if the additional funds are made available, there will be sufficient teachers available. I am sad to say that teachers

[Mr. Foster]

are leaving the profession in droves: 20,000 have left in the past 12 months. On the other side of the coin, we know that fewer and fewer quality candidates are being recruited to start training to enter the profession.

Thirdly, I am genuinely concerned that there may be insufficient flexibility in the approach to class size reduction to take account of local circumstances. We shall still need to know how the Government expect a local education authority to deal with the arrival of the 31st child of a particular age group, hoping to attend a small village school. Will he be sent a long distance to another school to meet the requirements of the class size ban, or will there be some flexibility?

When the Minister for School Standards responds, will he say, given his understandable desire to reduce class sizes, what he will do in terms of schools, particularly small schools, that will be using non-qualified teachers—not least those who are in their probationary year or those who are training?

I very much support the Government's plans to involve local education authorities in their effort to raise standards, but more details will be needed. In the White Paper we read:

"If we are to hold LEAs to account for their performance, we owe it to them to ensure that they have a clear job description".

But, sadly, the Bill does not provide that clear job description. It does not even provide a list of the functions that an LEA will be expected to perform and to be funded for under the new financial arrangements. Those are clearly matters for the Committee to consider, and I look forward to receiving more information than is provided in the Bill.

On the subject of LEAs, I have two more points to raise. First, if LEAs are to be given the crucial role of raising standards in their schools, it is strange that their involvement in the appointment of head teachers is to be so severely diminished. After all, all the research shows that one of the most crucial factors in a school's success or failure is the skill, expertise and talents of the head teacher. Although it is right that governors should take the final decision, it is important that LEAs, which are to be intimately involved in ensuring success in individual schools, should have a role to play in headship appointment that is greater than that which is currently envisaged.

Secondly, although I accept and welcome the Secretary of State's decision to return to local level more powers to determine school reorganisation, I am unconvinced by the proposed means of doing so. The Bill envisages the establishment of school organisation committees, yet it is the LEA that is constitutionally responsible for securing the supply of school places. Therefore, decisions should rest with the elected LEA, not with a separate unelected body that does not even have to meet the financial or other consequences of its decisions. If school organisation committees are to be established, they should have no more than an advisory function.

Similarly, I am concerned about the role of the adjudicator in determining appeals in respect of reorganisation plans. The role should be like that of an ombudsman—limited to determining whether there is proper consultation and whether the decision is legal. It would be wholly wrong for the adjudicator to be given power, as appears to be envisaged, to take an alternative view on policy.

In respect of education action zones, the main difference between myself and the Government is simple: they believe that education action zones are a good thing, whereas I believe that they are a phenomenally good thing. They are one of the most exciting aspects of the Bill. They will bring meaning to the concept of partnership and could ensure a real impetus to drive up standards. They will provide something that is currently missing from our education system—the ability for professionals at local level to experiment and share best practice.

I hope that almost every LEA will lobby for the establishment of a zone in its area. I am aware of the problems, and the right hon. Member for Charnwood raised some of them—for example, the problem of so-called boundary effects, with differential funding of schools on either side of the boundary. I am also aware of concerns about the possibility of opting out of national pay arrangements. However, those problems can be overcome.

There are other issues that require greater clarification—for example, which powers will individual school governors be allowed to hand over to the forum? How will the work of forums be co-ordinated with other initiatives, such as early excellence centres, health action zones and regeneration initiatives? Perhaps most important, how will funding be arranged? After all, if a zone is to run for three to five years, it would be wholly wrong and almost impossible for it to operate if it has to stick with a process of annual bidding for funding.

May I urge the Minister to make one specific change to the policy, which is to include LEA representatives in education action zone forums? When the Secretary of State launched his education action zone proposals on 15 April this year, I read with interest that

"These pilots will be planned and delivered by partnerships between business, schools and LEAs".

I do not believe that the Secretary of State can have changed his mind in such a short time, so I must assume that the absence of LEA representation on the forums is a mistake and one that I hope will be shortly rectified.

I described the Bill as the good, the bad and the ugly, and I turn now to what I believe to be the ugly—those aspects of the Bill that deal with the framework for schools and with selection. We all remember that, long before the election, the Labour party rightly urged us all to concentrate on standards and not on structures; but, as the right hon. Member for Charnwood said, because such a major part of the Bill is devoted to structures, the Government themselves are forcing our attention on to structures and away from standards. I have three brief points to make in that respect.

In opposition, the Labour party joined the Liberal Democrats in combined opposition to grant- maintained status. It is a great pity that, in government, the Labour party is appeasing GM schools. There is no justification for the establishment of foundation schools. GM schools could and should be returned to the LEA framework. It cannot be argued, as some Labour Members have done, that there is no difference in effect between community and foundation schools; if that were true, there would be no need for a separate status.

The only reason for the establishment of foundation schools is as a sop to those relatively few parents who supported GM status. What is bizarre is that the Government are taking this step at a time when there is little enthusiasm for foundation status.

Mr. Dafis: It is especially bizarre that the legislation will create an entire category for, in Wales, a total of 17 schools out of 3,000.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I am glad that he shares my view that the measure is bizarre. I am sure that he will share my delight at the likelihood of the Roman Catholic diocesan education authorities advising their current GM schools to avoid foundation status, and the possibility of the Church of England authorities following suit.

With the exception of the few parents I mentioned, perhaps the only real excitement about foundation status comes from those consultants who are rubbing their hands with glee at the thought of all the extra business they hope to attract. The Minister may already be aware of organisations such as the Centre for Education Management Ltd., which runs foundation school conferences aimed specifically at

"the substantial number of county schools across the country who are affected by local government reorganisation and a potential deterioration of service."

It is quite clear that that organisation knows something about the benefits of foundation status that, so far, I have missed.

Mr. McLoughlin: Why does the hon. Gentleman put so much faith in local education authorities, which can hold back so much money from schools, whereas GM schools receive their money directly?

Mr. Foster: If the hon. Gentleman is so keen on that approach, I am surprised that he will be trooping through the Lobby against the Second Reading of the Bill. As he will know, the Bill contains the plans for a whole new financial settlement, which will make clear the respective jobs, responsibilities and funding of schools and local education authorities. Given the view he has expressed, I am sure that he will change his mind and join us in the Aye Lobby later tonight.

We know that there is little support for foundation status among local education authorities. The Minister knows the figures—he gave them to me in a written reply, and I will remind him what he wrote:

"Some 70 per cent. of LEAs raised concerns about foundation school category, of which some two thirds are Labour-controlled authorities."—[*Official Report*, 17 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 29.]

The Minister knows that there is no need and no desire for the provisions in this part of the Bill, and that they should be dropped.

There has been one significant change that has occurred between the White Paper and the Bill that no one can fathom. In the Bill, we read about the allocation of grant-maintained special schools to the category of foundation special schools, but such an option was effectively ruled out in the White Paper. Even more recently, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), produced her extremely good Green Paper on special educational needs, in which the Government stated that they were against foundation status for special schools because

"of the importance we attach to the place of special schools in a unified service supporting greater inclusion."

There has been a sudden and dramatic U-turn on the part of the Government, so it would appear that 21 GM special schools have a significantly greater influence on the Government than the majority of LEAs, including Labour-controlled ones, whose views have fallen on deaf ears.

Finally, I shall discuss grammar schools and selection. I welcome the fact that the Government are giving an opportunity at local level for reconsideration of grammar school status, but I believe that the mechanism that they propose, with a cumbersome, bureaucratic, ballot system, is wrong, and that it would be far better for the decision to be left, after consultation, to the LEAs.

Even more bizarrely, we are witnessing another U-turn on the issue of partial selection. In his 1995 Labour party conference speech, the present Secretary of State said:

"Watch my lips: no selection by exams or interview under Labour."

Yet what do we find in the Bill? The Government accept no new introduction of partial selection by ability, but existing arrangements can remain unless there is both a challenge and a decision by the adjudicator that it must end. That gives no guarantee that all existing partial selection would end—yet that was promised, and that is what should be delivered.

I have been obliged to focus on the bits of the Bill about which we are concerned, but there are many good bits, measures that we believe will help to achieve what we all seek: the raising of standards in our schools and the establishment of an education service that delivers excellence for all. We shall work in Committee to change some aspects of the Bill, but the Government can be assured of our support for the main thrust of the Bill. Therefore we shall support the Second Reading tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose-*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As it has been some time since the debate started, before I call the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) I remind the House that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches.

6.50 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall keep my comments brief.

I very much welcome the School Standards and Framework Bill, because of the need to tackle the low educational achievement in my constituency. I shall focus on those problems in my speech.

My local authority is taking steps to tackle those problems in a five-year educational plan, which I shall refer to if time permits. Some of the problems that have occurred in my constituency are a direct result of the previous Government's policies. One of their policies was to close down the major employer, the coal industry, and another was to starve my local authority of the resources that it required to maintain local government services.

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

The local authority has tried to re-industrialise the borough, but one reason why we have not made significant progress in that regard is the low educational achievement in our schools. Employers are discouraged from investing in the Barnsley area because of the low level of achievement and, obviously, they would not want their children to attend school in an area that does not do as well as other areas.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Illsley: No; there is no time.

In my constituency, there is a culture of low achievement and low aspirations. Schoolchildren feel that achieving qualifications is pointless because of a shortage of employment opportunities after they leave school. Worse, some teachers feel the same. They think that it is pointless to try to teach schoolchildren to achieve GCSE qualifications because of the culture of low achievement and low aspirations.

I shall mention some of the problems that exist in my constituency and I shall refer to the White Paper, "Excellence in Schools", which refers to the problems of changes in the nature of employment, which have led to educational changes.

Until a few years ago, the major employer in my constituency was the coal industry. Although the industry brought benefits of stability, long-term, relatively well-paid jobs, and educational facilities—including apprenticeships, day release courses and educational opportunities through industry—it also brought problems. There was a reliance on a single industry, and a culture of low achievement and low aspiration resulted. People did not aspire beyond working in that industry.

As a result of the closure of the coal industry a few years ago, employment in my constituency fell by 19 per cent. between 1981 and 1991. Coopers and Lybrand has estimated that to reach the national average level of employment we would need to create 19,000 jobs in the constituency by 2001—a practically impossible task, made more difficult by low educational achievement and the low aspirations of the community. Gross domestic product per head in South Yorkshire is low, at 76 per cent., well below the national average, which causes problems.

That brings me to the figures for educational attainment in my constituency. Despite recent improvements, only 28 per cent. of Barnsley pupils obtain five or more A to C grades at GCSE. The national average, which is itself low, is 44 per cent.

Other local problems include high and rising crime. In 1979, crime in Barnsley was 25 per cent. below the national average; by 1994, it was 13 per cent. above it. Many people receive council tax benefits or have long-term debilitating injuries or illness. Those are the problems that have caused the culture of low achievement.

In 1989 in Barnsley, on average 15 per cent. of children gained five or more A to C passes at GCSE. In 1995, the figure was 28 per cent. In 1996 it was 28.3 per cent., compared to a national average of 44 per cent.

Barnsley pupils do not reach the national average level of attainment at any stage at which they are tested. At key stage 1, we score 75 per cent. compared with a national average of 79. At age 14, we score 46 per cent. compared with a national average of 57 and at GCSE we score 28 per cent.

I fully support the Bill, because those low achievement levels must be tackled. I agree entirely with the passage in the White Paper "Excellence in Schools":

> "One of the most powerful underlying reasons for low performance in our schools has been low expectations which have allowed poor quality teaching to continue unchallenged. Too many teachers, parents and pupils have come to accept a ceiling on achievement which is far below what is possible."

That exactly sums up the problem in my constituency.

I especially welcome the proposals to introduce educational development plans, but I am disappointed that the duty on the local education authority to agree targets with schools has been dropped. Targets would have been welcome in the situation that exists in my constituency.

As I said, my local authority has embarked on a plan to improve educational standards, which draws on much that is in the White Paper and the Bill. However, although the local education authority is trying to increase standards and improve pupils' performance it is coming up against teachers who do not accept that GCSEs are a standard—who do not accept that they are the be-all and end-all of education. Perhaps they are not, but in my constituency the education system is failing children because their inability to achieve qualifications prevents them from passing into further and higher education or into decent jobs.

I wish that the Minister would address that problem and enable local education authorities to impose standards or targets on schools, especially in areas such as mine. The teachers' view is that their job is to produce well-rounded individuals, as the head teachers put it, instead of enabling pupils to gain qualifications.

I shall now mention specialist schools. A school in my constituency, Priory school, aspires to specialise in sport. Unfortunately, to do so it must raise about £100,000, and in an area such as mine that money is very difficult to obtain, although the school is committed, with a forward-thinking head teacher and excellent staff. I ask the Minister to consider whether support might be given to schools such as that, to kick-start the process of achieving specialist status.

The Barnsley education partnership is an excellent venture. It uses partnership and collaboration with the local colleges, such as Northern college and Bretton college, with the local universities, the Government office for Yorkshire and the Humber, the Barnsley Business Education Partnership, the health authority, the police, the trades union council, the voluntary sector, the Churches, the chamber of commerce and many more. The aim is to raise aspirations, and to improve the culture of education.

We have a problem, however. Despite an increase of more than £4 million in our standard spending assessment this year—notionally—the authority is still £2.5 million short, in cash terms, of money to spend on education. I shall be meeting local government Ministers next week to try to secure funds from other sources. It is obvious that, if we are to improve

standards, implement the Bill and maintain the plan on which the local authority has embarked, we shall need more resources. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will support Barnsley's case.

7 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I shall confine myself to two aspects of the Bill. The first is the education action zone; the second is parental ballots, and the future of grammar schools.

I feel that education action zones should be effectively integrated in wider regeneration programmes, especially in inner cities. We know from our experience of regeneration that dealing with only one aspect of deprivation does not work. It is necessary to deal with housing, training, the environment, policing, law and order, and job availability. We have learnt that the issue must be dealt with in the round. Our main problem was involving educational institutions. I am not talking about those in charge of training; that was easy enough. I am talking about actually getting down to the schools. The problem was partly due to the Department's marked reluctance to become involved in the programmes.

We know why the problems are so deep-rooted in some inner-city primary schools. My father was headmaster of a primary school that was within site of Armley gaol in Leeds for many years, and our family therefore experienced those problems in a very practical way. We knew about the low expectations of many teaching staff, we knew about the culture of non-achievement, and we knew how desperate some family backgrounds were when all the bad elements were combined. There is much to be said for education action zones as a concept, but they must be integrated into the wider regeneration programme.

The question is, how is that to be achieved at a time when the regeneration programmes themselves are about to undergo significant change? First, the new regional development agencies are intended to take over the management of the programmes; secondly, the Government are reputed to be toying with the idea of moving to a different concept of regeneration—the French idea of "contrats de ville"—rather than using the single regeneration budget, which is applicable throughout the country. "Contrats de ville" are contracts between the centre and urban areas, and do not have universal coverage.

It is crucial that there should be no dislocation. Will the education action zones be urged to apply for regeneration funds, or a replacement? Will they be part of a wider partnership—a real partnership, with the zones performing one of the functions that are required? What measures will the Government take to ensure that the concept of education action zones is part of the broader regeneration effort?

As our experience tells us, the concept will not work if the Government do not take such measures; but I hope very much that it will work. We shall start putting the inner cities right when we start putting primary schools right, and changing the attitudes of parents, staff and local people, who must have ownership of the schemes.

My second worry is about the future of grammar schools, which affects my constituency. North Yorkshire has a countywide selective system. I need to know what the Government intend for ballots. Who will vote? Will it be parents of children at primary schools, which are the feeder schools? Will it be "one vote, one child", or "one vote, one family"? Will parents of children at secondary schools have a vote? Will voting be confined to the catchment areas of the schools involved, or are we talking about the education authorities as a whole?

Let me explain why that matters by referring to my old school, Ripon grammar school. When I was at that school, it was not part of the educational elite: passing Latin O-level was regarded as a singular achievement. Ripon grammar school draws from 14 primary schools in its catchment area. The most pupils it takes from those schools is 18; the fewest is one; quite often, it takes one or two. It also draws from 11 primary schools outside its catchment area, often taking one or two pupils. In addition, it draws from eight independent primary schools—between one and four pupils—and it happens to be a boarding school as well.

In those circumstances, who will have a vote? Will all the parents who are sending one child a year to a primary school have a vote? Will parents outside the catchment area have a vote?

Ripon grammar school is outstanding. It is at the top of the league tables—as it ought to be: North Yorkshire has a selective system, and we do not have the massive social problems that characterise more urban areas. If we cannot do well, we clearly are not trying.

Ever since I was brought up in Ripon, there have been arguments between the grammar school, which I attended and which happens to be on one side of the road, and the secondary modern on the other side of the road—now called Ripon city school—where my father taught. There has been a flight of pupils to Boroughbridge, Harrogate and other areas, because of the problems that are perceived to exist in the city school.

The city school, however, is now making enormous strides. For the last couple of years, it has had a new headmaster, Mr. Paul Lowery, who has said, "I am not interested in this lack of expectation. I am not interested in assuming that these kids are only good enough to work as check-out operatives in multiple retail stores. I think that they can do something, and I look forward to the school's having a graduate society."

The school now has a sixth form, and an extensive community education programme. It intends to apply for special status as a technology school. When the application is submitted, I shall be lobbying the Minister. Numbers are going up at the school, and its results are improving, because attitudes and expectations have changed. The last thing it needs is the upheaval of reorganisation.

It would help if the North Yorkshire education authority stopped using the city school—because it had spare places; because it experienced a period of decline—as a place in which to put kids who have had problems in all the other schools: as a collective for local difficulties.

Every time Mr. Lowery tries to pull the school up another notch, he experiences the dislocation caused by people being dropped on him throughout the school year by the LEA. It would be enormously helpful to him if that stopped, and he was given a real opportunity to attack some of the school's problems. He is managing to do that, however: examination results have improved vastly, as has the whole atmosphere in the school. That happened because someone said, "It can be done," rather than, "I do not think that it can be done."

[Mr. David Curry]

The sensible thing for Ripon to do is develop twin schools with different but equal excellence, able to work together when that is in the best interests of the children. One school may be more academically inclined and the other more vocationally inclined, but children should be able to cross the road when the courses are mixed in order to get the best from both schools.

I know that both Mr. Lowery—headmaster of the city school—and Mr. Alan Jones, headmaster of the grammar school, subscribe to that vision of the future of education in Ripon, and that neither thinks that it would be good for them or their schools if we embarked on another period of debate about the structure. That argument has plagued Ripon for generations, and those years of guerrilla warfare—all the uncertainty, bitterness and division that happen in a small community like Ripon—must end. A full stop must be written at the end of those paragraphs.

South Craven school in my constituency is at the opposite extreme. It is probably the biggest all-in comprehensive in North Yorkshire. It is an excellent school, but it takes literally hundreds of children from Bradford metropolitan authority. We can see why people are fleeing from that authority, but, in fact, many children go there by choice. Will the parents have a say in any ballot on the future of education in North Yorkshire, which is vital to them?

If there are ballots, what will be the role of the local education authority? I hope that it will be told to have no role at all. I do not want the LEA to influence the ballot; I do not want it to use its resources to send circulars to all the parents, and try to secure one or other result. We have seen that happen in the past. Local education authorities should be ready to implement what parents decide is right for them. I hope that the Government will be on guard against that, and against unrepresentative pressure groups that always emerge on such occasions.

Will the Minister contemplate change only when it is clear both that the opinion of all parents concerned is in favour, and that there are undisputable educational advantages to be gained from reorganisation? Change too often takes place as a result of a sustained third of dislocation, community unease and guerrilla war in local communities. If we can put an end to that, we can do education a great service.

I trust the Minister's good will. He wants to get the argument settled, as most people do. It would help if he would spell that out tonight.

7.9 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). I welcome this measure—yet another manifesto commitment fulfilled. When the Secretary of State introduced the Bill to the House, he had every reason to be proud. It is landmark legislation, the intention of which approximates the achievements of the Education Act 1944.

I welcome the references to maximum class sizes, the safeguarding of the religious ethic, school meals, nutritional standards and work-related learning, among other provisions. I particularly welcome the strengthening of ministerial powers. So far as I can see, the Bill is a centralising measure. The able Minister for School Standards now has his hands on the levers of power in an unprecedented way—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may not like it, but that is the Bill's long-term impact. Some LEAs, many of them Conservative, have failed both pupils and schools. If the Minister wants to grip them firmly by the throat, he now has the power to do so.

If giving unprecedented strong powers to the schools Minister helps to improve failing schools, and helps vulnerable pupils to achieve their full potential, so be it. If it livens up errant LEAs, so much the better.

I want the measure to help poor children from homes that lack some aspects of life that we would like them to have. Too many children grow up on decrepit, aging, featureless council estates. To put it bluntly, at this time of year their homes are not warm; their diet is suspect; and the streets that surround their homes are haunted by vandals who give a bad example to young schoolchildren. There is too much shabbiness and squalor, and there is often a drugs culture.

In those neighbourhoods and on those estates, many of which exist throughout the land, there are break-ins and intimidation by yobbish gangs. On some of those streets where youngsters go daily to school, there are more jobless than employed people. In those localities, marriages and partnerships simply fall apart, which results in a weakened social fabric.

Many youngsters experience a series of temporary, sometimes resident fathers. Children stay up late at night and often watch unacceptable videos at a late hour. That is no preparation for school the next day. Do they get a reasonable breakfast? Are they adequately dressed for the cold? Too often, school is the only place where children are told what is right and what is wrong, because the attitude of some parents—perhaps many—towards their young children is irresponsible.

The Bill is overdue. I hope that it will enhance and develop the lives of tens of thousands of children who live in poverty, cold, neglect and ignorance. Any ubiquitous and observant Member of Parliament will remain haunted by the evidence of children growing up in areas of social breakdown, which exist throughout the land. The problem I define is growing worse by the month. I hope that the Bill will give a better deal to many young children.

Social justice is one of the Government's prime objectives, and the Bill draws inspiration from the need for social justice.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I cannot give way, as my speech is limited to 10 minutes. I mean no discourtesy to the hon. Gentleman, who might know my area and have an insight into the problems there.

Children should be the first recipients of social justice, but many of them miss out hopelessly and often. This historic Bill will enhance the lives and prospects of countless thousands of children, but it is a tall order for me even to hope for that objective, which is why I welcome the social exclusion unit and the impact which I expect it will have on schooling. The unit and the Bill will together make inroads into the scandalous conditions in which many children live and learn. With the Prime Minister at the helm, good will come of the unit's work.

The social exclusion unit's analysis of the worst housing estates must be crucial, and I look forward to its report and to the action that it will propose between Government Departments. Many primary and comprehensive schools are located within, or on the edge of, vast housing estates. The huge social problems march straight into the neighbourhood schools, and teachers therefore must cease to be professors of knowledge and face up to everyday school emergencies as social workers, mothers, fathers, nurses and comforters.

I therefore make a cautionary plea to the Government. Teachers groan as legislation follows legislation. They feel overwhelmed by paper and threatened by ceaseless inspections and the publicity about the consequential disclosure of the inspector's findings. The demands about which they complain are Conservative Government demands, but this Bill will ask even more of the profession. Even more pressure will therefore be put on teachers, who already have very low morale. We must take account of that.

Headmasters must now be accountants, publicists, marketing directors, clerks of works, politicians and diplomats. The pressure on headmasters grows and grows, and too many of them seek an early exit from their responsibilities. I urge the Government to take that into account.

This is a good Bill, and I want it implemented speedily. Above all, I hope that it will help children from poor homes.

7.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): This is the time of magic in the theatre. Children will be queueing to see people flying without wires and generally performing all kinds of magical tricks. There is an assumption in this debate that, if only we had the best possible Act of Parliament, all kinds of terrible things would cease to be, and children would instantly warm to their school, parents would take their responsibilities seriously, teachers would enjoy their jobs, and before you could say Jack Robinson—

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Geoffrey Robinson.

Mr. Rowe:—or even Geoffrey Robinson, all the problems would be solved.

Coming from Kent, I have strong reservations about the Bill. It is true that Kent, like areas that are wholly comprehensive, has some under-performing schools, but some of the under-performing schools have already improved enormously as a result of going grant-maintained. I echo the experience of my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). One of my local schools that took itself out of the local education authority's control has now created a sixth form which it was being denied, and this year for the first time has pupils going to Oxford and Cambridge.

Chance is to be taken away. Our county has an extraordinarily rich tradition of grammar schools, and they are by and large centres of excellence. Good education is a strangely delicate plant, which blossoms unpredictably and shrivels equally unpredictably. Experience suggests that it has most chance of continuous success where there are communities with a long history of academic excellence. To undermine such communities through Act of Parliament, even if that is on a tendentious ballot, would not be wise.

I welcome the Bill's approval of centres of aptitude, but I bitterly regret its hostility to grant-maintained and grammar schools. In view of earlier exchanges, it is worth recalling that Kent has this time passed on every penny of the extra money that has been handed out to schools, in stark contrast to the Lib-Lab pact, the predecessor of the Conservative Administration, which kept £10 million out of £16 million.

New Labour should be proud of the Bill. It features at least two of new Labour's central beliefs: first, in central control—the man in Whitehall knows best; and secondly, that the best way to deal with people's failings is to punish them. "Zero tolerance" and "hit squads" are the key phrases here.

I understand. It is a natural reaction to the shocking waste of young people, which is still a feature of our education system. Eleven years of compulsory attendance under threat of penal sanctions should lead to delivery of something worth having, or the penal sanctions should be scrapped.

If I buy a duff product in a shop, I can get my investment back. If I buy a house on a false prospectus, I can get redress. If, under legal sanction, I send my child to a school which delivers to the child nothing of value, I have no redress at all. Is it not time to have a proper, enforceable contract with schools, or no doubt with the Secretary of State, if the Bill is passed in its present form?

The contract with parents may help some families and some schools in some areas, but it is no substitute for a properly enforceable contract whereby the school promises to deliver certain things, the parents and the child promise in return to make themselves available in the appropriate ways, and if nothing worth having is delivered at the end, there should be some redress.

I have some sympathy with ministerial impatience, but I am astonished at how little the Secretary of State said about the central element in all education—teachers. Teachers need a new deal. The world of any teacher who has been in the profession for more than 20 years has changed beyond recognition. That is a result not just of new technology, with which we must all come to terms, but of an entirely new social environment.

In many schools, the majority of pupils come from broken homes, and for many of those children, being dropped at the school gates may be no opportunity, but may be seen rather as another rejection. Huge numbers of pupils come to school with few or no social skills, no self-discipline, and no respect for any adult, including the teacher.

With every new social problem handed to teachers has come a further restriction on their traditional systems of control, yet most teachers have been left to handle these difficult developments with little or no serious support. As a result, they have too often low self-confidence and low expectations of their charges. It is therefore not surprising how hard many of them find it, for example, to welcome volunteer help or to deploy it if they get it.

We know from research that the most effective way of cutting truancy is by teaching in a way that holds the interest of pupils. The Government would do better to concentrate on retraining current teachers and improving

[Mr. Rowe]

the training of aspirant teachers than to threaten them with hit squads and other punitive instruments. None of us can feel content with the present situation—a shortfall last year of more than 2,000 entering initial teacher training, one third of those who successfully completed initial teacher training in 1995 not being employed as teachers, and 10,200 leaving the profession for other employment in 1995-96.

Instead of yet again messing about with structure, including destroying proven successful structures, why do not the new Labour Government concentrate on the most valuable resource at their disposal—the teachers? It is 15 years since I came within an ace of establishing with private finance the first distance staff college for head teachers. I still believe that to take a leaf out of the armed services' book and provide a staff college for putative head teachers would be one of the most effective ways of achieving higher standards.

What teachers want more than anything else is other teachers to assist them in improving their standards, not being told how to do it from outside.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch) *rose—*

Mr. Rowe: No, I am sorry. With a 10-minute limit, we always lose the enjoyable experience of being broken in upon.

What we teach is important, and it is different from what many people think. Recent studies have shown, for example, that pupils find religious education surprisingly enjoyable. They discover for the first time that there is another element to their lives, apart from the purely materialistic.

I believe that that is one of the areas in which we should develop our skills. We should also, as I have often said in the House—the Minister knows my views—develop voluntary help in schools much further. Most teachers would welcome the opportunity to extend their grasp through responsible voluntary assistance. Pupils learn faster by teaching other pupils some of the things they need to know—especially subjects such as health education, or how to deal with bullying or racial harassment. There are good examples of that which can work extremely well. If older pupils teach younger pupils, both sides profit enormously.

Finally, we should put a great deal of emphasis on the development of the volunteer involvement of employees of local businesses in schools. Not only does that extend the skills of the volunteers and those they teach, but it involves the businesses in the local school. The more we can draw schools into community involvement, the better.

7.28 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): If we must meet in Christmas week, it is just as well that we should consider some glad tidings. The Bill is extremely positive, and I congratulate the Government on their single-minded drive to improve standards in education. I welcome the greater involvement of the local education authorities. After 18 years of the Tories drawing education power to the centre, I am glad that at last some authority is returning to the LEAs.

The Government clearly take seriously the principle of partnership. The Bill draws in schools, teachers, governors, parents, pupils, business, the training and enterprise councils and central Government in raising standards across the board.

We must also bear in mind the fact that the Government are making resources available in order to achieve the class size objective. Resources are important if we are to raise education standards. The Government have allocated nearly an extra £2.5 billion to schools, including £1 billion from the contingency reserve and the new deal for schools from 1998-99, and they will provide another £1.3 billion in grants for school maintenance over the next five years. I think that that is proof of the Government's commitment of resources as well as ideas in their single-minded drive to improve education standards.

With regard to the role of parents as envisaged in the Bill, the Jesuit cliché, "Give me the child at five and I will show you the man"—apart from its one-sided focus on the male of the species and its underrating of the years from zero to four—contains the essential truth that the early years of a child's development play a profound part in determining his or her life chances. I am glad that the Bill recognises, as the Secretary of State said when presenting the White Paper in July, that parents are a child's first teachers. Rather than treating that as a mere truism, the Bill contains concrete ideas for ensuring that parents are more involved in enhancing the life chances of their children from early years, through their school years, until they leave school and, sooner or later, the family home. More than that, the Bill contains concrete mechanisms for involving parents in the success of their child's school, and therefore of the community in which they live.

I shall comment on just two measures. First, I turn to the home-school contract. Leeds local education authority, in common with many others, already promotes parental commitment via home-school contracts. When I consulted parents and teachers in my constituency over the summer to gauge their reaction to the White Paper, they suggested that, while home-school contracts are a good idea, they need more legal strength in order to do the job. Therefore, I am pleased that the Government have chosen to put on the face of the Bill the requirement for parents to sign home-school contracts and for governors to ensure that they do so unless exceptional circumstances apply. However, in time, the Government may wish to consider ensuring that contracts are a condition of admission and that failure to observe the requirements of a home-school contract brings a legal sanction upon the head of the parent or guardian.

The contracts spell out that parents also have the right to expect the school and its teachers to display a minimum of good practice in teaching the pupils, just as the school has a right to expect the co-operation of parents. I would want to avoid any problems associated with legal claims for damages on the basis of a pupil's performance, but I think that we must consider the strength of home-school contracts. In addition, the Bill provides for parent governors in schools. Parents must have a genuinely representative voice on boards of governors, which, together with their presence on LEA committees, will help to cement the partnership that the Bill tries to bring about.

Secondly, the Bill gives various roles to LEAs after 18 years of Conservative hostility to those authorities—it was clear from the way in which the Conservatives

presented their policies during the election campaign that LEAs would have ceased to exist if the Conservatives had won the election. I welcome the participation of LEAs and their commitment to raising standards. That can be seen in several specific ways. It is a matter not just of warm words and pious hopes but of definite proposals to enhance co-operation between schools, schools and LEAs, between LEAs, and with other key community and education stakeholders.

We can see that in the proposals for school organisation committees and in the role that LEAs will play in producing early years development plans and development plans that will apply in each area. LEAs will make a constructive and positive impact on the way in which schools approach the raising of standards: their duty will be to promote higher standards. Ofsted may be brought into a school at the behest of the LEA and emergency teams may be sent in by the Secretary of State when a LEA is judged to have failed. Schools will be required to produce capability procedures for removing teachers who are deemed to be poor performers. Those measures will give LEAs a bigger role in ensuring schools take education standards seriously.

Mention was made today of education action zones, which are another option open to LEAs. That proposal has been broadly welcomed, so I shall not dwell upon it now. Education action zones will be particularly important in deprived areas.

I must also comment on class sizes. It is important that we take class size seriously and that we recognise that it matters. For years, I heard Conservative Education Ministers claiming that there was no evidence that pupil performance improved as class sizes were reduced. The abolition of the assisted places scheme is already releasing money under the standards fund that will be used to help infant schools to realise our class size objective and pledge.

However, we cannot legislate for a change to class sizes of 30 or under for all five, six and seven-year-olds in one fell swoop. According to the House of Commons Library, there are as many as 13,502 classes of 31 pupils or over. Speaking to teachers, I found that they rejected any attempt to force a rigid number upon all infant classes within a short time scale—not through any scepticism that the objective was worth realising, but through concern about over-rigidity of prescriptiveness and resources. That concern is shared widely by teachers and local authority representatives alike.

Thankfully, the class size commitment in the Bill is not too prescriptive. It allows the Secretary of State to set class size targets, but they may be determined according to age within the infant school sector and will, I hope, not follow too tight a timetable. The Bill also allows LEAs to draw up proposals for realising the class size objective, thereby allowing local factors to be taken into consideration. Unless flexibility is introduced into the school appeals system, not only will the ability of schools to achieve the class size objective be undermined, but the distance that some children must travel to school will frustrate attempts to encourage parents to give a commitment to the school beyond securing their child's place at it.

The Bill makes clear that parental preference must not

"prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources",

which includes the duty of the LEA to comply with the class size commitment. Given that the Greenwich judgment is still very much in place and that appeals increased by more than 8,500 to 62,900 in the period from 1994–95 to 1995–96, that is good news for schools that are wondering how they can achieve the Government's objective. I also welcome the fact that the Bill states that an LEA's power to direct a school to admit a pupil shall likewise be in accordance with the class size objective and that the school should be a

"reasonable distance from the child's home."

The need to encourage parental commitment to schools, and thus to their communities, is inevitably compromised by the right to send children many miles away from home in pursuit of a place that may lie in another LEA area. I am glad that the Government have adopted a flexible approach to the class size question.

7.38 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I could not disagree more with the first few words of the speech by the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell) when he welcomed the Bill for giving more powers to local education authorities. Looking back on my experiences with my local education authority, I think that any Bill that gives LEAs more power is to be regretted.

We heard the exchanges between the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) earlier today. There is a long-running argument in Derbyshire about the amount of money that central Government have given the county council and, at the end of the day, how much of that money has found its way into schools. I regret that the Bill does not set out a way to ensure that the money that the Government provide, irrespective of party politics, finds its way into schools and not, perhaps, into some of the education authorities' favourite projects.

A long-running dispute between myself and Derbyshire county council involves the subsidy of school meals. The Under-Secretary of State answered one of my parliamentary questions only a few weeks ago. I asked the hon. Lady to provide a list of the amount of subsidy in the form of school meals that was given to the shire counties. It will not surprise the House to know, bearing in mind what I have just said, that, over 10 years, Derbyshire came top of the league in providing the greatest subsidy—and not by short measure, but by a huge amount.

From 1986-87 to 1995-96, Derbyshire provided a subsidy of about £150 million. Over the same period, the neighbouring authority of Staffordshire provided a subsidy of about £64 million. If an authority takes a decision to subsidise school meals, it can do so, but the money cannot be spent twice. If an authority decides to subsidise school meals, the money that is used for that purpose will not be available for education, and it will not be available for schools generally.

I am glad to say that it seems now that Derbyshire county council basically agrees with me. There has recently been industrial action between Unison and the council. The council has been trying to reduce the subsidy for school meals by about £2.6 million. For the first time in 11 years, some of the press releases issued by the county council could have been put out under my own name. One such press release reads:

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"Figures released by Unison show how much more efficient the Derbyshire service needs to become to bring it into line with services in other neighbouring counties. Last year Nottinghamshire spent £8.51 per head and Leicestershire £6.77 per head on their school meals services, compared with £12.78 per head in Derbyshire."

Councillor Wilcox, chairman of the education committee, said:

"What these figures actually demonstrate is the need for our service to become more efficient to protect the future of the service and to make it more attractive to parents and pupils."

The council has also been saying that if money is spent on subsidising school meals, that money will not be available for the education service within the county. I agree with that and I much regret that for 10 years we have had a sterile debate about the level of subsidies provided by the county council for school meals when that money should have been made available for the schools to reduce class sizes.

Unfortunately, because the county council wanted to make a political point, it continued with what I believe was an unrealistic subsidy. Finally, it is having to come to grips with reality. That led to industrial action taking place within the county, which is doing no one any good. It is not doing the school meals service any good, and it is not doing pupils' education any good.

Derbyshire has suffered because it provided a subsidy for school meals that was larger than that of any other shire county. The result has been a diminution of the quality of school buildings and an increase in class sizes. At the same time the council can go on only about the difference in spending and in allocation between Hertfordshire and Derbyshire.

In the past, I have supported the case for a review of the additional cost allowance. In that regard, I welcome the Government's undertaking. The previous Government initiated an independent review, and the result was a solution different from that which I wanted. We shall see in due course the Government's eventual solution to area cost adjustments. I understand from a recent parliamentary answer that it will be some time before the Government see area cost adjustments being changed in any way.

Derbyshire county council seems to rely on the difference in spending between it and Hertfordshire county council. That brings me to the annual capital allowances that were announced by the Government last week. The Minister of State sent us a letter which set out what the allowances would be. Even the new Government have given Hertfordshire about £7.2 million and Derbyshire about £5.8 million. We need to spend money on schools, on reducing class sizes and on ensuring that expansion takes place where it is necessary. There is no difference between any of us on those issues, but Derbyshire argued that it was treated unfairly by the previous Government. By the same token, it would seem that it has been treated unfairly by the Labour Government.

I am concerned about the future of grant-maintained schools, given the terms of the Bill. It is clear from the Bill that the Government are proposing to introduce foundation governors, who will come from the local education authorities, to sit on GM school boards. The Government seem to be forgetting some of the battles that they encouraged when in opposition between schools that wished to become grant maintained and those that did not. The Under-Secretary of State shakes her head—it would seem that she disagrees with me profoundly. Anyone who was an observer when schools were opting for GM status will be aware of what took place.

I understand that the Minister represents a Birmingham constituency. There were horrendous stories circulating in Birmingham about the lengths to which the authority was prepared to go to try to stop schools becoming grant maintained. There were similar stories about other authorities. It is thought now, however, that there will be sweetness and light and that no malice will be held by local education authorities although they have witnessed battles in the past. I do not believe that. On the contrary, I believe that there is a threat to the future and structure of GM schools.

I remember a school that became grant-maintained in my constituency. There was a large public meeting about a threat to its sixth form. One of the LEA governors said, "I believe that the school should retain its sixth form, but I have been appointed by the LEA and because the authority wants to close the sixth form, that is all right by me, and that is what I shall support." I see that the Government Deputy Chief Whip acknowledging that that is a policy which might find agreement in other areas, but I do not accept that that is the way forward for the structure and future of our schools.

A large education Bill is before us and I regret that Back-Bench Members have only a short time to discuss it. However, that is one of the factors of the parliamentary timetable. Like any large education measure, there are parts of it that are to be welcomed. Sadly, however, I believe that overall the Bill will lead to a diminution of education, especially within schools which have been brave enough to take the GM course. That is my regret.

7.47 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I suppose that it is fitting, despite the invitations to be elsewhere, that our final debate before the Christmas recess should be on our first priority as a new Government. This allows us to end the calendar year where we started the new term—putting education at the heart of our agenda.

When I was preparing for the debate I looked back at the debate on Second Reading of the previous Government's last, dismal attempts to improve schools. Two issues dominated that debate, and both were irrelevant to the central problems facing us in British schools. First, there was the proposal, led by the then Prime Minister, to have a grammar school in every town, which meant that yet again we focused our energies on structures and not standards, on policies for the privileged few, not those for the nation's many, and on ideology-driven dogma instead of what works.

Secondly, there was the proposition that caning our children would improve discipline. It may be hard to believe that today, but we were having what purported to be a serious debate on education standards and Conservative Members believed that the answer was to legalise the whacking of children in schools. That was not said in a pre-Christmas haze of excess alcohol, nor was it proposed in a debate on April fool's day; although it seemed to be a poor rewrite of an Ealing studio comedy, it simply reflected the Conservative Government in their final hours—utterly bereft of any serious and sensible ideas.

The same attitude was evident when the present Bill was published and given its First Reading. There was obviously a great deal of public interest in the far-reaching proposals that it contained, but where were the Opposition? The shadow Secretary of State, who is not his place, had apparently retreated from Westminster to the country and his deputy refused to appear on several programmes because, apparently, she had not been briefed. Indeed, in one studio the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) and I were left with an empty chair for the Conservatives because they were unable to find anyone at all to comment on any of the proposals in the Bill. That says it all.

For my part, I believe that the Bill sets out the most radical yet practical agenda for education for a generation. In their first eight months, the Labour Government have produced a raft of measures that will help to create an age of achievement in Britain's schools. It is wonderful to see in the Bill proposals which really focus on education standards and recognise that education is central to our ability to deliver welfare reform and social cohesion—the Government's other two priorities. From nursery education to class sizes, from setting literacy and numeracy targets to introducing home-school contracts, from bringing in assessments for five-year-olds to value-added data on children and schools, from fast-track proposals for bright children to fresh-start proposals for failing schools, from homework and literacy clubs to repairing 10,000 schools by 2002, it is an ambitious programme designed to ensure that every child in every school gets the best opportunity to learn.

I want to comment on two specific proposals. First, the Bill will demand a complete rethink for local education authorities. I strongly support that. In the past, LEAs have intervened, often on a daily basis, in the detailed running of schools. The Bill demands that they change and recognise that the days of the all-powerful interfering LEA are over. LEAs have a new and different task which is vital to our purpose. They must become an integral part of the crusade to raise standards. *[Interruption.]* Obviously, Opposition Members do not understand the Bill.

By preparing an education development plan, LEAs will lead the local drive to promote school improvement. By monitoring schools, they will ensure that targets are met. Where schools are succeeding, LEAs must learn to take a back seat; where schools are failing, they must intervene swiftly and decisively.

All too often, the Opposition have criticised LEAs—and they are doing so again today—but in 18 years they did nothing to tackle their under-performance. The Bill contains clauses which show that the new Labour Government will not tolerate failing LEAs. However, I hope that LEAs will grasp their new role with enthusiasm and view it as an opportunity, not a threat. Indeed, some LEAs, such as Birmingham and Barking and Dagenham, have already begun to show the way. Steering schools to improve their performance rather than running services which schools themselves can run is an enormous challenge. It is a different role, not a diminished role—a crucial role, not a minor role.

There are those in right-wing think tanks who urge that we should abolish LEAs and run education from Whitehall. They are wrong. We cannot effectively run 24,000 schools from Sanctuary buildings, and if we ever abolished LEAs we would have to reinvent them in another guise. The centre will never have the capacity to monitor sufficiently or intervene appropriately at local level. I say that as a parent and politician whose children were educated mostly under the Inner London Education Authority. Even ILEA was too large and remote to step in early enough to prevent a problem from developing into a crisis in such schools as William Tyndale, Highbury Quadrant or Highbury Grove.

We need the democratic accountability of elected LEAs to provide the partnership, parental involvement and community and business commitment that will help to translate our policies into practice. So the task for Government is to encourage, cajole and insist that LEAs adapt to their new role. Local democracy is about empowering people, not politicians and for the LEA that means acting as the voice for parents and children—for the consumers and not the producers in the education system.

The second proposition on which I wish to comment is the education action zones. The proposals could revolutionise education in deprived and underperforming areas. Disadvantage cannot excuse failure in our schools or low attainment levels for some children, but equally we need to offer schools in deprived areas the means to tackle that disadvantage.

Unlike the Tories, we in the Labour party recognise the problems that social deprivation brings to education and we are committed to addressing them. I hope that the education action zones, with the freedoms that they gain and the resources that they attract, will become hotbeds of innovation and best practice.

Creating a formal structure around a family of schools is good in itself because it encourages sharing of good practice and helps provide the pressure and support to develop the good and deal with the poor. Creating formal partnerships between schools, parents, businesses and other local interests is also good in itself, because schools perform best with the support of their local communities, not detached from them. Releasing schools from some of the constraints in the national curriculum will ensure that literacy and numeracy become the fulcrum on which a broad and balanced curriculum must rest. Providing extra money will enable us to target resources where they are most needed.

Finally, I am delighted that the zones will be able to apply for exemption from teachers' statutory pay and conditions. The recent Select Committee report on teacher supply suggested a range of proposals to raise the quality and increase the number of teachers. Some involve rewarding teachers on performance mobility, not just length of service. We need to test those ideas.

Further, I have long argued that allowing a precious capital resource—our schools—to remain unused for a quarter of the year while teachers are exhausted by cramming too much into the teaching term and, during the long summer holidays, children who need to catch up and keep up with their peers forget what they have learnt, is nonsense. It is a relic of the days when children were expected to help with the harvest and mothers worked only in the home. I hope that experiments will take place in education action zones to challenge those outdated traditions.

The Bill represents a watershed in British education. It is about promoting what works and ensuring fairness. For 18 long years, parents, pupils and teachers have

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suffered from a penny-pinching dogma-driven attitude to Britain's schools. Now at last we have a Government who are committed to high standards for all, who rely on common sense and best practice for their policies and who really have made better education their No. 1 priority.

7.57 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), and I congratulate her on a very fine speech. Having crossed swords with the hon. Lady many times when I was local government finance Minister and she was leading delegations to squeeze more money out of me, I must say that her raft of measures is drifting swiftly to the right. It is Christmas week, but her remarks sounded like an early leaked draft of the Queen's Speech. However, I am delighted that the hon. Lady feels that way. There is always room for her on the Opposition side if the Government do not give her a job.

I start by declaring an interest and making a confession. My interest is that I am an associate member of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers—an excellent organisation which I joined in 1967 when I was a professional teacher and continue to support. However, I should like to make it clear to the House that I pay it—it does not pay me.

My confession is that I have read the Bill from cover to cover. Last Thursday, I had occasion to travel on one of Mr. Richard Branson's excellent express trains to Preston and that provided me with a good opportunity to challenge the Bill. It took me the whole journey there to read it and most of the journey back to read the schedules. It was not a great read; nor is it a great Bill. It leaves out quite a lot. For example, it leaves out the whole vexed issue of school transport, which for most schools yields more grief than most educational topics with which schools have to cope. I regret that omission. As a former teacher of 16 years, I should like to be the first Member on either side of the House just to say thank you and a very happy Christmas to our teaching profession.

When I was on the Government Benches, I took years and years of stick from the Labour party because we Conservatives did not send our children to state schools and did not know what we were talking about. We heard that again tonight. It was a delight to hear the outburst of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), which we know really represented what is in the hearts and minds of most Labour Members. We heard the same from the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). I thought that when he said that Ministers had at last got schools by the throat, he was articulating something that is deeply felt by the Labour party.

Fifteen years ago, there was conflict between selective and non-selective schools in my constituency. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) showed clearly that that period of unhappy dissention has come to an end—certainly in my constituency, where there is huge strength in the diversity of schools. We have comprehensives with and without sixth forms, secondary moderns, special schools, hospital schools, grammar schools, independent schools and a further education college—and that is just for a population of about 100,000. I am proud to say that there are no bad schools in my constituency. I have no difficulty—indeed, I have great pride—in supporting them all.

The Government's blueprint for change is a bit of a curate's egg. The Bill could bring new vision and hope to children, parents and teachers, or it could bring with it an orgy of destruction and grief. The legislation will see the end of local independence for grant-maintained schools, such as Westwood St. Thomas in my constituency, which will be forced back under the county council from which it so recently escaped. I deplore the way in which Church schools will be treated. There will be no role in the hiring and firing of teachers for the diocesan director of education, and a reduction in the number of Church-appointed governors. On other issues, the Church schools are happier.

Through the Bill, new Labour is taking massive powers from local people and handing them to Ministers. The present Ministers are such very nice people. I worry very much about who will follow them. I have enjoyed much debate with the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), and her colleagues, and formerly with the Secretary of State on very important and fundamental local government issues, such as local government finance, the poll tax and the council tax. I worry about giving so much power to such very nice people, only to see in a year or two completely different people in their posts.

The Bill represents no new, open government. The future of our grammar schools, such as Bishop Wordsworth's school and South Wilts grammar school in my constituency, hang on the ballots of parents. The regulations on which parents may vote are still secret. Ministers must realise how easy it would be to rig the ballot in favour of abolition. I noticed that the Secretary of State mentioned that issue in his speech, and I noted carefully what he said. He referred to appropriate feeder and primary schools where 20 per cent. of relevant parents trigger a ballot.

What is an appropriate feeder school? Who are relevant parents? Those secrets will not do. We must know the exact detail before we can possibly support the measures, or we shall realise that they are just a cover-up for old Labour's antipathy towards grammar and grant-maintained schools. I challenge Ministers not just to try to put the clock back 18 years but to encourage exciting developments.

The variety of good schools in my constituency is remarkable. I hope that any new Act will build on it. Pride in the town of Amesbury is under stress, since all our sixth formers are having to leave their town for others for post-16 education. That is not of practical benefit to the community. When the pattern of local education was settled 15 or so years ago, the population of the town was never envisaged to be as great as it is now. It is not helpful to Amesbury and it is a disincentive to young people that post-16 education means trekking miles each day—and back again—up to Durrington, down to Salisbury or, indeed, out of the county.

Fashion in education changes, too. Fifteen years ago, the experts thought that 16-year-olds would grow up more quickly and better in colleges of further education. Today, parents usually prefer a school sixth form to provide a more appropriate atmosphere for learning and personal development. Parents in my constituency in Downton, Amesbury and much of Salisbury understand that very well. That is why I welcome and support moves by Wyvern boys technology college and St. Edmund's secondary modern for girls on the Laverstock site to

explore the opportunity of a new joint sixth form. I look forward to the arrival of the Wyvern baccalaureate—approved by the university of Bath.

Such a joint sixth form would pose no threat to existing schools. It would mean changes for Salisbury college, but it is doing extremely well at expanding further education and its franchised degree courses. It has opted to change its own character and realises that other educational establishments will change theirs. Will Ministers tell me whether the sort of changes that I have described will be encouraged by the Bill?

Schedule 17 deals with the staffing of voluntary-aided schools. It is a very long schedule of 24 paragraphs—although not as long as schedule 28, which has 146 paragraphs. There are 30 schedules, 130 pages of small print and a fistfuls of blank cheques.

I know that the Church of England is disappointed that the measure introduced in 1991 concerning the diocesan board of education is not reinforced by or incorporated in the Bill. That measure requires that, in a Church of England voluntary-aided school, the chief education officer of the local education authority and the diocesan director of education should have the same rights. Personally, I should have preferred those rights to apply to voluntary-controlled schools as well.

Paragraph 2 of schedule 17 provides that the governing body may agree with the LEA to accord advisory rights to the chief education officer in the engagement or dismissal of teachers—but if the governors do not agree, the Secretary of State can overrule them anyway under the joyous situation that we are about to see unfold. Paragraph 2(7) explains that the chief education officer includes

"any officer of the authority nominated by the chief education officer."

The poor old diocesan director is still left out. The Bill recognises neither the rights nor the responsibilities of diocesan directors of education. That is not acceptable, and I ask Ministers to amend schedule 17 in Committee to put that right in the interests of building a partnership with Church schools.

Similarly, I hope that Ministers will consider again the role of governors in schools where a diocesan board of education had a majority of appointments of foundation governors, which will be forced to abandon GM status and become new foundation schools, and where the Church will have only a minority of appointments to the same school, serving the same community.

Will the Minister reveal the identity of the spectre at the feast who appears briefly in schedule 9? In the explanatory memorandum, we are told in chapter III—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has had his 10 minutes.

8.7 pm

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Like my hon. Friends, I welcome the Bill's Second Reading.

Also like many of my hon. Friends, during the summer recess, I had the opportunity to bring together teachers, governors and representatives of the education department in my constituency to discuss the White Paper "Excellence in Schools". I was—as I always am—struck by their dedication and commitment, their enthusiasm for the legislation and the White Paper, and their remarks about improving standards in education.

It is vital that we continue to listen, co-operate and understand the realities of teaching in the late 1990s. There can be no doubt that, in certain areas, teachers do one of the most difficult jobs. They face many demands from every quarter—from children, parents, governors, local education authorities, employers, colleges and universities. Not least, and rightly, there are demands from the Government—because education is our No. 1 priority. All of us are reliant on having good teachers, and that is what the majority are. At the meetings that I have organised, the new, clear and accountable role of the LEA in raising standards was welcomed. The education officers in my constituency see their role as a positive partnership with schools, not one of unnecessary interference, as was alleged earlier.

I can understand why some of the grant-maintained schools in my constituency have some anxiety about re-establishing their relationship with the LEA. However, the fact that LEAs will be subject to rigorous inspections, as schools are, will be welcome and will perhaps alleviate some of the anxiety. Time will tell.

It is right that schools should have autonomy and be able to develop their personalities and aspirations. However, they should not be isolated from the rest of the education community in their area. All schools have to be involved if we are to develop the most effective education development plans and to ensure that we maximise resources. By resources, I mean knowledge and not just finance. An example of that is promoting and sharing best practice and exchanging information about home-school contracts.

During the meetings that I organised, the issue of home-school contracts prompted much debate. For many schools, they are a straightforward exercise involving co-operative parents and well-behaved children. For other schools, home-school contracts mean expending considerable effort and energy. If home-school contracts are to be worth while, they must be more than just a paper exercise. The piece of paper is secondary: the most important requirement is the relationship, and developing a positive relationship with some parents is not always easy. Getting them to take an active interest in their child's education in school can appear damned near impossible.

However, those parents often have the children with the greatest needs; indeed, the children's needs can be so great because of their parents. It can be done, and the school of which I am proud to be a governor—Wayfield primary in Chatham—sees the developing of two-way responsibility between parents and school as the key to continuing its improvement. Getting home-school contracts right and developing the relationships will have many rewards and help to tackle the problems about which we have heard, such as deprivation and bad behaviour.

In Kent, we face particular challenges in improving education standards for all children. Historically, the county has been underfunded, despite its relative wealth—contrary to what the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said—and that has been well recorded and recognised. For decades, Kent has been one of the lowest investors in education. For example,

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between 1991 and 1993, Conservative Kent robbed schools of £80 million. It underspent its education standard spending assessment by £53.2 million between 1991 and 1992 and by £29.7 million between 1992 and 1993, at a time when schools were crumbling and the school repair bill in Kent totalled £75 million. Worse still, children with special educational needs had to wait four years for their statements to be produced.

Fortunately, a sea change occurred. Under the stewardship of my colleague, Joyce Esterson, the co-chair of education, Kent received a much-needed boost. Between 1993 and 1997, the administration, like the Government, placed education at the top of its priorities. It improved standards and resources and, importantly, developed a working partnership with the teaching profession that did not previously exist. Gone were outside toilets, down to six months went the wait for special education needs statements, and the first nursery classes were built in Kent since the previous Labour Government's urban aid programme. I am proud to say that one of those nurseries was built in my constituency, in Chatham.

We also saw the introduction of the children's university, an innovative practice which opened schools on Saturday mornings to those children who needed extra tuition. That boost was achieved by parents, teachers and the LEA working together. I am pleased to say that the new Tory administration in Kent will continue the improvements laid down in previous years and has pledged to fund education fully, up to its SSA. Unfortunately, it now appears that the administration will charge for the children's university. That is to be regretted because it may exclude children from poorer families.

Kent faces a further significant challenge if it is to achieve the education system it wants. In Kent, we have 40 of the 163 11-plus selective grammar schools, which provide excellent education for 30 per cent. of Kent children. The vast majority of the rest go to secondary moderns. I welcome the opportunity that the ballots will provide to have a real debate about how we can ensure the best education system in Kent for all children. My position is clear: I want Kent to develop a modern comprehensive system, but that will be for parents to decide. I believe that all parents with children of statutory school age should have the right to decide, and I look forward to the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister on that point.

Why do I believe that a modern comprehensive system would be best for Kent children? The argument is not about ideology but about outcomes. The figures are alarming. When one compares Kent, which is a reasonably affluent area, with other areas, the figures do not make sense. In Kent, we have four out of the 20 of the lowest achieving schools, in A to C grades, in the country. We have the school with the lowest exam results in the country, despite that school having receiving a very good Ofsted report. In Kent, 42 schools have lower exam results than the lowest scorer in East Sussex. In Kent, 17 schools have lower exam results than the lowest scorer in Tower Hamlets, where 90 per cent. of pupils have English as a second language. In Kent, we have 24 schools that have lower exam results than the lowest performer in Wales. What makes Kent different? Selection.

Imagine how difficult it is in secondary moderns, as a pupil who has failed the 11-plus and where 50 or even 60 per cent. of children in a class have special educational needs. That is simply not fair, although the work and the effort that teachers in those schools put in should be applauded—I certainly applaud them.

Exam results are not the only issue. Funding is also important. The grammar schools have large sixth forms and, therefore, extra money and better facilities. Within a mile of my constituency, there is a grammar school with excellent facilities and superb buildings, yet just down the road there is another school with its paint peeling off and its bricks crumbling. That is inequality, and it is a disgrace that cannot continue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

8.17 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): The Bill has been flagged by the Government as a significant event for Wales. The separate education White Paper for Wales was entitled "Building Excellent Schools Together". I think that the word "together" was supposed to convey something about the special circumstances of Wales.

The Bill is also the first major measure since the devolution referendum on an area of policy that falls within the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Wales and will therefore be the responsibility of the national Assembly of Wales, which will be up and running in just over 18 months. The purpose of the Assembly, beyond the primary function of asserting and expressing constitutionally the national status of Wales for the first time in 600 years, is to enable the development of policies appropriate to Wales, springing from Welsh values and realities and geared to achieving success for Wales.

The Bill will progress through the House at the same time as the Bill to establish the national Assembly for Wales. The Secretary of State for Wales, in his preface to the White Paper on devolution, referred to schools as a particular example of the way in which the Assembly would enable the people of Wales to pursue their priorities.

At Welsh questions, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain)—the Minister responsible for education in Wales—whether he thought that the Assembly would have powers to implement policy measures in education that would be distinctive for Wales. He responded positively, and claimed that it would. The problem is that the Assembly will have no primary legislative powers and, for a national Assembly, that is a grievous deficiency—to put it mildly. Labour Members have asserted that that is not an insuperable problem because primary legislation can be designed to give scope for action through the secondary legislative powers which the Assembly will have. There has been much talk about Henry VIII-style legislation and the scope that that provides.

I wanted to see what provision there was in the Bill for distinctive policies relevant to Wales to be developed by the Assembly which, as I have said, will be up and running in 18 months. I was not much encouraged by what the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said [illegible] to my

intervention. He suggested that there would be scope for variation, but that it would have to be within the principles in the Bill. I do not like all those principles.

For the reasons I have mentioned, the Bill is a significant event for Wales, but I cannot see all that much relevance in it. I cannot see that it will enable us to design the policies that I want to see implemented in Wales. I am not sure whether the irrelevance of the Bill is a matter of design or a matter of default. Having studied it carefully, I am not all that much the wiser.

It cannot be only I who am none the wiser, because the Library's briefing paper does not provide much help. I was hoping for assistance from the Library in understanding the implications of clause 118(6), which says:

"Any order or regulations under this Act may make different provision in relation to England and Wales respectively."

However, the Library briefing stops abruptly at clause 117—obviously, it did not feel like tackling the issue.

I am unclear on the extent to which the Bill will facilitate or frustrate the crucial task of building excellent schools together, as the Welsh White Paper puts it. I am unsure, but, from what I have seen, I am sceptical. There is one welcome exception: the provision in clauses 112 and 113 to foster a collaborative initiative in Wales between further education colleges and schools in providing post-16 education. That is a welcome response to the findings of the Select Committee report on further education in Wales, with which I was proud to be associated.

The measure should provide a starting point to enable the national Assembly to move towards an integrated comprehensive tertiary system—the kind of system that would be cost-efficient and would eliminate the wasteful duplication we see in post-16 education in Wales. It will provide a real choice for students in a wide range of subject areas, both vocational and academic, and would enable the combination of the two.

I hope that we are able to move quickly towards the implementation and the adoption of the Welsh bac—the Welsh baccalaureate—as the main post-16 qualification in Wales. I was disappointed by the Welsh Office's refusal to fund a pilot for the Welsh bac. That sprung, I am afraid, from the terror of doing things differently in Wales from what happens in England. I am confident that the Assembly will not make the same mistake.

There is much that is good in the Bill, but I am afraid that there is much that gives profound concern as well. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] There is far too much accommodation of the agenda and obsessions of the previous Government; the agreement that I received from Conservative Members shows that they are not in tune with my reservations.

The previous Government clearly saw the competitive market as the engine for driving up standards. Not only would schools compete for pupils, but pupils would compete for places in schools. Schools performance tables—league tables, as they are called—are only an instrument to enable parents to participate in that competitive market. They were accompanied by the aggressive rhetoric sometimes associated with the private sector and competition, especially in relation to teachers' performance.

The Government have reined in all of that and modified the approach, but too much remains. As for aggressive [illegible]

What is the difference, I ask myself, between zero tolerance and intolerance? I do not like to see the naming and shaming of schools, as that is not the way to tackle the real problems.

As well as the emphasis on pupils' preferences, the Bill gives far too much credence to selection. The Bill protects, rather than attacks, grammar schools—despite what some Tories have said—and will allow them to expand. It will allow other selective schools to continue to select on the basis of ability. Clause 93 proposes to allow selection by ability to be increased through the back door. It uses the term "aptitude", but aptitude on one or more subjects is a pretty good indicator of general ability. It is not a perfect indicator, but any teacher will know that it is a good one.

The measure has been introduced in the name of specialism—that is its justification. We are told that this is at the heart of the Secretary of State's and the Government's vision of the education system. Education will cater for the individual strengths of a child rather than assuming a bland sameness for all. If the Government are serious about avoiding a bland sameness, I suggest that they listen carefully to the proposals of the Third Sector Schools Alliance to allow schools with alternative curricula, such as Muslim schools, to come into the maintained sector.

I am dubious about the idea of specialist schools. Pupils need a first-rate general education, with the variations that one gets between schools. The idea of selecting pupils for hot-house treatment in PE or music is rather manipulative and disturbing. However, I am more worried by the credibility that the Bill gives to the principle of selection by ability. It is true that it is limited to 10 per cent., but it is establishing the principle of selection, and it makes it easier for a future Government to expand the principle. I do not necessarily mean a Conservative Government, or a Government not led by the present Prime Minister. The Labour Government, under this Prime Minister, are capable of extending the principle—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.27 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak. While offering—the House will not be surprised to hear—my wholehearted support for and endorsement of the Government for the Bill, it is important to remind the House of the historical context of the Bill, which makes its production after such a short period so impressive.

During the past 50 years, the schools system has suffered from some of the most horrendous swings. In the 1950s, we had rote learning and the approach of the "sheep and goats" tendency parodied by, among others, Dennis Potter—when a teacher said, "Good morning," all the pupils wrote it down. We then had the 1960s and 1970s. There were many good things in that period, such as the creative originality and expression that were given rein in schools, but damaging pseudo-educational theories were also perpetrated. This Government are determined to repair the resultant damage and chaos caused to literacy

[Mr. Gordon Marsden]

We then had the Tory Administration, with their emphasis on dogma. In the 1980s, there were times when I thought that the Tory party had gone Maoist, so committed was it to the doctrine of permanent revolution. Now, we have an opportunity to put all that behind us.

My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have rightly produced a Bill that puts the emphasis on standards and not on structures. What concerns all hon. Members is how the Bill will be judged in our constituencies and how it will affect schools there. Many of our constituencies have an enormous variety of social circumstances and schools. That is one reason the provision of education action zones in smaller areas than the traditional local education authority areas is so important.

In the central area of my constituency, conditions mimic those of the inner city—60 to 65 per cent. of children have free school meals, classes are large, conditions are often cramped and do not permit expansion, and many children are from bed-and-breakfast backgrounds.

Earlier this year, with our shadow Health spokesperson—now my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—I visited a nursery in the constituency that I was hoping to gain. We spoke to the people responsible for the three and four-year-olds before they went on to school and were told that one of their most important tasks was to teach table manners. We asked what they meant. They told us that they had to teach children how to sit at table and use a knife and fork because many of them spent their time sitting on the edge of a bed eating takeaways and did not know how to use a knife and fork or a plate properly. That is the social context in which the early years forum, which is presaged by the Bill, is so important. It is also the social context in which literacy schemes aimed at both the adult population and children are so important, and it is one reason I commend the Bill so warmly.

Hon. Members have heard that there was a tremendous response to the consultation process on the White Paper. My constituency was no exception. I called a meeting, which was attended by more than 80 school governors, chairs and teachers, and we had a good discussion. Most of the principles of the Bill are based on the White Paper. I have here a little extract from one of the comments. Some hon. Members have commented on the voluntary sector. A voluntary-aided comprehensive school in my constituency says that the White Paper

"is ambitious and encouraging. It has a coherence to it and is based on the principles and practices which underpin the education service. For the first time in many years, a Government document gets to the roots of what is important in education and in the raising of standards."

That is why I was saddened at the shadow Secretary of State's curmudgeonly approach to the White Paper and to the value of education action zones. Were it not for the fact that his rhetoric descended on us with all the impact of a slap in the face with a wet kipper, it would have been particularly unfortunate and unpleasant, because the education action zones will hit many of the buttons that must be pressed in 1990s education. They will allow flexibility and the involvement of many agencies and will break down the disastrous divorce between private and public education. They will show the importance of early-years education and bring in youth workers and local business

Echoing the thoughts expressed by other hon. Members this evening, I hope that as many education authorities and sub-authorities as possible will apply to be education action zones. They are not something to be aimed merely at failing schools and standards.

The Bill will be judged on the hope that it brings to individual schools. About a month ago, I presented prizes at a high school in my constituency. It is a community school, with 400 or 500 pupils drawn mainly from the local estates. When we debate the Bill in more detail, the importance of school size and its relevance to teaching techniques will become increasingly apparent.

The school does not have the best GCSE results in Blackpool, but it has an enormous sense of community spirit. Frankly, in some respects the teaching is old-fashioned, and it is none the worse for that. The pride of the teachers, pupils and parents comes across. In music and sport, for example, the school does much better than average, and those are the sort of things that will be recognised as a result of the Bill and the education action zones, as well as our well-heralded priorities on literacy and numeracy.

At the prize giving, I had to come up with the old clichés about what one says on such occasions. I mentioned my school motto—it is in Latin, as I am afraid that I went to one of those old-fashioned schools—"Vincit qui patitur". I explained that it was technically, "He conquers who endures", or "He conquers who suffers" and said that another way to look at it was, "You will get there if you stick at it." Getting there if you stick at it is at the heart of the Bill.

As a Government, we are not trying to reinvent the wheel or to block out everything that has happened in the past 20 to 30 years. We are trying to make a systematic impact on society and to tackle all the various problems with an holistic approach. That is why the Bill and the concept of education action zones are so important, and why I am delighted to commend the Bill to the House.

8.36 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I found much in the speech of the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) with which I was able to agree, in particular most of his remarks about education action zones, but I feel that we have had something of a Jekyll and Hyde act from Labour Back Benchers and, indeed, the Government.

We have had "A Christmas Carol" of sorts; the Secretary of State and Labour Members denounced every educational initiative of the 1980s, but they seem to have been changed beyond all recognition, presumably by sympathetic hauntings from the benevolent spirits of Lord Joseph and Lord Baker. They now come before us ready to accept the system of testing, independent inspection and league tables that they resisted with their utmost energy and vigour when they were on the Opposition Benches and Conservative Ministers were taking the measures through the House.

While Conservative Members, following the lead of my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), welcome that conversion and the emphasis, or at least the rhetorical emphasis, that the Secretary of State placed on the need to drive up school standards, we also remain united in our opposition to those parts of the Bill that seek

content with mediocrity, but to pull down and destroy schools that are achieving on behalf of pupils they exist to serve. My right hon. Friend referred to the way in which grant-maintained schools, whose independence the Bill would extinguish, have succeeded in improving standards and acting as catalysts for innovation and greater diversity within the maintained system of education.

In Buckinghamshire, we have the only local education authority with an entirely selective secondary education system. It is not simply an accident that, this year, Buckinghamshire has also produced the best GCSE results of any local education authority.

Mr. Brady: My local authority—Trafford—is also entirely selective, and we can compete in having the best A-level results in the country.

Mr. Lidington: I am delighted that we can engage in this friendly competition. Of course, my hon. Friend has to contend with a Labour party in Trafford that is, sadly, committed to destroying those schools and the success to which he referred.

In Buckinghamshire, not only the grammar schools, such as Aylesbury high school, Aylesbury grammar school and Sir Henry Floyd grammar school, are achieving high standards. As Labour and Opposition Members have said today, we live in an educational world that can accommodate diversity and in which there is a growing recognition that schools of different characters can exist side by side, each pursuing excellence in its own sphere.

One need only look at some of the non-selective upper schools in my constituency or elsewhere in Buckinghamshire, such as the Misbourne school in Great Missenden or Holmer Green upper school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), which was singled out by the chief inspector in his published list of the most successful schools in the country, to see that dedicated governors and teachers, with the support of parents, can succeed and put to rest the myth that a selective system can succeed only by favouring the few at the expense of the many.

I hope that, if the Government, as I fear they will, insist on including the clauses that aim at the extinction of selective grammar schools, they will at least comply with the request of my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood to publish, at an early stage of our proceedings in Committee, the draft regulations that are to govern the operation of grammar school ballots. We need to know exactly which parents are to be eligible to take part.

I welcome what has been said about the 20 per cent. trigger for such a ballot and the recognition in the Bill that circumstances may differ between some authorities; a ballot for a particular school may be appropriate in some circumstances and in others a ballot covering the entire LEA might be better.

I hope that the Minister for School Standards, either today or when he publishes the draft regulations, will explain the Government's view on the possibility of a moratorium after a ballot. It would be regrettable if, once a ballot had settled matters and parents had decided to retain grammar schools, there were to be a further period of uncertainty, lasting possibly for many years, as one

Other parts of the Bill also cause me concern. As well as publishing the draft regulations on grammar school ballots, I hope that the Government will not delay long in issuing the draft code on admissions policy that the Secretary of State proposes to publish. The policy proposed in the Bill would give much greater control to the Secretary of State over the policies of individual governing bodies and local education authorities.

As I understand the Bill, admissions procedures would have to be drawn up by the relevant admission authority—either the LEA or a governing body—and that, if that admission authority was a governing body, it would have to consult not only its own LEA but all other admission authorities for all other maintained schools in the relevant area. It would fall to the Secretary of State to define the relevant area; as the Bill stands, the term could apply to an area greater or smaller than an individual LEA. The Government owe it to the House to allow those matters to be explored adequately in Committee.

The Bill refers to appeals being made to an adjudicator. I would like to know more about that official's function, his terms of reference and whether his decisions would be subject to judicial review by the courts. The adjudicator himself could refer to the Secretary of State.

How would the admissions policy proposed in the Bill interact with the Government's policy on class sizes? There are only two ways in which it seems to me to be possible for the Government to meet their targets on class sizes: the first is to find from some source or other large additional resources to pay for the employment of teachers and teaching assistants. I have seen nothing in the figures that the Government have published so far—this is about the only matter on which I agree with the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)—to suggest that they have the money in the kitty to fund such additional appointments; the second is to insist, through a strict admissions policy and a limit on appeals, that more children attend schools to which their parents do not want to send them. The Bill will severely restrict parental rights of appeal.

The hon. Member for Bath and my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) referred to the problem of the 31st child, as identified by the Local Government Association. What happens in a school that serves a small town or village in a rural area? Is that child to be bussed many miles to a different school far from home? Are brothers and sisters to be split up because they fall foul of the arbitrary ceiling that the Government want to impose?

Are we in danger of getting into a system in which children whose birthdays happen to fall late in the academic year cannot get into the school near home or the school of their parents' choice simply because all the places up to the prescribed limit have been filled by the children who are lucky enough to have been born earlier? That strikes me as unfair.

I hope that the Minister will answer those detailed points, either today or in Committee.

8.46 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I support the Bill in general and especially the education action zones, linked as they are to the concepts of innovation and raising standards. There is widespread support for them, and I

[Valerie Davey]

Foster) commenting enthusiastically and amazed to hear the Secretary of State adding his support—a conversion, I feel, from the dogma of competition to that of co-operation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shadow."] Thank you. I meant the shadow Secretary of State.

There is also varied support outside the House. The National Association of Head Teachers regards the zones as

"an exciting concept that could have a dramatic impact on progress towards achieving national targets"

and Third Sector Schools Alliance says that the zones have the potential to enable radical measures to be tested. The basic concept is not new: groups of schools in all parts of the country that have sought, despite the divisive competition promoted by the previous Government, to work together, will welcome the proposals.

We welcome the proposals because they are based on collaboration, which brings the more efficient use of resources, including staff; the sharing of new ideas in the school community and beyond; the ability to attract the interest of commerce, industry and other partners; and a widening of links within education, from pre-school to post-retirement.

Young people in the education action zones will see the widening partnership and will see themselves within it as part of those communities. Previously, such groups, clusters and federations had only their innate good sense to support them against the hostile and divisive policies of the previous Government.

I want to consider briefly a federation that started in south Bristol in the mid-1980s. Five, and later six, secondary schools, which had been denied a tertiary college by the previous Government, came together of their own volition with their local further education college mutually to support the young people of the area. There was joint funding for someone to co-ordinate the federation. That person soon became an advocate and gained a high profile, and high-profile sponsorship, not only for individual pupils but for events and for longer-term projects. The staff came together across subjects, school age groups and sectors for local training. They came together to share ideas.

It was not long before the children of south Bristol were getting a better deal. We could see the beginnings of an improvement in their school standards. It was slowed down, and finally stopped, by the incorporation of the further education college and the reduced funding for schools in the punitive local management of schools system that so emphasised the need to increase pupil numbers.

We are therefore considering a system that has already been tried and that, under this Bill, would go even further. The proposals will not only bring together the groups that the south Bristol federation attempted to unite; in the action zones, members from local communities, business, industry and the voluntary sector would come together to support schools. There would also be a wider age spectrum. Parents would be attracted to further community education. As they got involved in education, lifelong learning would become a reality.

I want schools in the action zones to benefit from the support of the community. I want the concept to lead to two-way process, especially if we can link the zones with the new health zones and the improvements in employment projects. The whole concept is inspiring, and I fully recommend it.

8.51 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Having spent the past 34 years in teaching in the maintained sector, I was disappointed by the carping criticism of Conservative Members. They fail to understand that the vast majority of schools, teaching organisations, governors, parents and teachers want an end to conflict in our schools. All of them welcome the Bill. That is why I welcome the requirement for local education authorities to raise standards and the fact that they will be held accountable for that duty. They can discharge it only in partnership with teachers, governors, parents and Government. Too often in my lifetime in education, we have seen conflict, not partnership, between those sectors. Let us not forget that that conflict was as fierce before 1979 as it has been since.

There are dangers in giving LEAs a central role in the drive to raise standards. Some already see the Bill as a green light to reimpose the era of control, this time based not on the argument of local democracy but on the slogans of standards. If we are to achieve what I believe the Government want from the Bill, and what we certainly want, the need to clarify the powers of LEAs is paramount.

Liberal Democrats have argued for light-touch LEAs. We realise the need for a framework to assist with admissions, the provision of school places, the support of major capital funding and the provision of advisory and support services., but it is not the LEAs' responsibility to monitor and judge teaching and learning. They must not be encouraged by the Bill to develop unfettered powers of intervention. The best relationships will be those where LEAs, such as North Yorkshire, are invited to support, not those that make schools offers they cannot refuse.

In Committee, we shall seek to establish in what circumstances LEAs should intervene in schools and whether schools have the right of appeal. If the Bill allows an interventionist or empire-building LEA to intervene at any stage at which it can identify a management issue in a school, we could be catapulted back into the 1970s. That would undermine the principle of partnership between schools and the LEA and the relationship between the governing body and the school. We shall seek from the Secretary of State a commitment to a statutory code of practice to clarify the powers of LEAs to intervene in schools so that the balance of partnership is maintained.

Like other hon. Members, I warmly welcome the Government's commitment to early-years education. The requirement for LEAs to draw up in partnership with recognised providers an early-years development plan is an excellent start, but the Government lack courage and vision in what is surely the most crucial area if we are to raise standards in all our schools. We recognise that, once the Chancellor of the Exchequer had adopted the seasonal character of Scrooge rather than Santa Claus on 2 May, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment was unlikely to look further than four-year-olds in considering early-years education. We understand his difficult position

nothing, but he knows only too well that providing places for four-year-olds will in itself do little to resolve the need for early-years education, and very little to expand provision.

Rather than improve provision, the previous Administration's vouchers-for-votes fiasco did the opposite. In the past year, 800 community-based pre-schools have closed and a further 1,500 are threatened with closure, almost entirely as a result of young children being admitted to schools shortly after their fourth birthday. In some authorities, there has been a near collapse of nursery school provision. The Government's proposals will do nothing to halt that trend, because many private sector providers can cannot survive on providing places for three-year-olds.

More worrying is the Secretary of State's lack of understanding of the nature of provision for three and four-year-olds. He rightly says that he wants quality provision for four-year-olds, but the reality is that more and more four-year-olds are being educated in reception classes. There are sound reasons for educating three and four-year-olds together, independently of children in reception classes. I trust that the Secretary of State will give a firm, timetabled commitment to phase in provision for three and four-year-olds, at least over the lifetime of this Parliament.

The Secretary of State must be aware that he cannot simply expand early-years education in isolation from a comprehensive child care strategy. We will therefore seek his support to make it a duty for LEAs to produce, with other public and private sector partners, a comprehensive plan to provide integrated child care and early-years education for children below statutory school age. Several of the Government's proposals for this Parliament depend on providing comprehensive education and care for under-fives. The new deal, welfare to work, nursery education, raising education standards, and even the benefit reductions for lone parents, are not stand-alone initiatives but part of the solution to the same problem: how do we in Britain in the 1990s create an inclusive society after years of division?

I must say to the Secretary of State that, unless we comprehensively address the need for child care provision and quality early years education as the foundation for raising standards, the rest of his Bill might just as well be shelved.

That leads me to an unfortunate omission from the Bill—reference to special education needs. The Secretary of State has produced an excellent White Paper, entitled "Excellence in schools", and it was pleasing to note the generous support it received when it was debated in the House a couple of weeks ago. Is the Secretary of State seriously suggesting, however, that a Bill to improve standards can be devoid of any reference to special education needs? The Liberal Democrats are committed to seeing our education system become a truly inclusive one, yet there remains a looseness surrounding the need to include children with special needs in mainstream education.

No doubt the Secretary of State will say that there is already adequate legislation on children with special needs in the Education Acts 1981, 1993 and 1996. After all, the 1981 Act directed LEAs to place all pupils in mainstream schools, but there were some important caveats. That was to be done provided it was compatible "receiving the special educational provision that he requires . . . the provision of efficient education for the children with whom he will be educated; and . . . the efficient use of resources."

In reality, those opt-out clauses gave sufficient scope for schools and some LEAs to refuse parental requests for mainstream provision for children with special needs.

I have been involved with the inclusion of children with special needs for more than 20 years. In Cleveland, we successfully integrated more than 90 per cent. of children at secondary age who had severe physical disabilities. That approach, which was championed by the Pocklington-Hegarty National Foundation for Educational Research study, has been replicated in almost all LEAs today. For the past 14 years in Leeds, I have had the privilege of being part of a major project to integrate children with severe learning difficulties, mostly children with Down's syndrome. Today, 80 per cent. of such children in Leeds are educated in mainstream schools.

The inclusive provision is, however, a lottery and whether a child receives education alongside his or her peers should not depend on where they live or who the head and the governors are. It should be a right and such provision should be made in the Bill. We will propose a new clause to the Bill that would make it a requirement for LEAs to enshrine the principle of inclusive education in their development plans.

Although the Government should be rightly commended for introducing the Bill, there is still much work to be done. For our part, we will work with the Government to clarify and improve the Bill. I trust that the Secretary of State will be open to our suggestions.

9 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I am most grateful to have the chance to participate in this debate because education and school standards are key issues for my constituency.

One of the advantages of speaking late in the debate is that one can sit and listen to everything that is said by the Opposition. By and large, their contributions have been marked by two things. First, they have talked endlessly about divisiveness and structures. We have heard a great deal from them about selection, grant-maintained schools, assisted places and the independent sector. In fact, they have shown every sign of wanting the divisiveness and conflict which so marred discussion of education in the late 1980s and early 1990s to continue.

The second matter about which Opposition Members have spoken endlessly is privilege and how to ensure that quality education is retained as a privilege for the few and not made a right for the majority of children.

The Bill sets out a framework that will get away from the conflict that caused so many problems in our education service in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It sets out the framework in which everyone who is involved in the education service can work in partnership. That partnership, which will involve different types of schools, including grant-maintained and even independent schools, as well as local education authorities and the community, including the business community, will operate for the benefit of children.

The Bill comes after exhaustive consultation in which all those partners and more looked in detail at how they

[Ms Sally Keeble]

They considered why children across the range of abilities do better in some schools than in others; what makes a good school; and the best practice that enables children to achieve. They also studied how to extend that best practice so that all children get the best added value out of their schooling.

Those considerations lead to the second aim of the Bill, which is to extend such educational advantages to all children. One of the most dramatic measures in the Bill, and probably one of the most difficult to achieve, is that designed to lower class sizes for children in those early years. Let me cite an example of the way in which that change will transform children's expectations at school. In my LEA in Northamptonshire about 3,000 children in early years education are taught in classes of more than 30. They will see the benefits of the Bill. It is worth noting that the assisted places scheme in Northamptonshire benefits just 253 children, at a cost of £949,000, which is enough to employ upwards of 50 teachers. I have no doubt where the public would rather see that sum of close on £1 million spent.

We have also heard the Opposition talk critically about some of the specific practice measures in the Bill, and I shall single out one: home-school contracts. They are extremely important and, in a certain sense, they fill one of the missing links in the education service. Where there is real disadvantage—I speak as a former leader of Southwark council where many of the children were extremely disadvantaged—one characteristic is that parents are frequently not involved in the school, or are hostile to it. Getting individual parents involved in their children's education will be a key element.

I wish to deal with two points of advantage and disadvantage. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) is shouting, "Cheltenham, Cheltenham, Cheltenham." I shall take him on, because I think that all three of us ex-Cheltenham ladies prove that, if a child with reasonable ability is placed in a school with small class sizes, well qualified teachers, good books, good equipment and lots of educational opportunities, he or she will obtain good exam results. That says nothing about the educational achievements of schools; all it tells us is how rich the parents are and how money could buy privilege in Tory Britain. The hon. Gentleman should not throw Cheltenham at me.

A further point relating to disadvantage perhaps applies particularly to Opposition Members. The pattern of disadvantage is changing. When I was at school, people used to talk about improving girls' achievements; now, a much bigger problem is what to do about under-achieving boys. In Northamptonshire in 1977, at key stage 1, in reading and writing, 85 per cent. of girls reached the expected levels, but only 76 per cent. of boys; at key stage 2, the figures were 66 per cent. for girls and 51 per cent. for boys; at GCSE, 46.9 per cent. of girls obtained five or more GCSE grades A to C and only 34.8 per cent. of boys achieved the same results. That is a growing problem that schools will have to address; perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards will say something about that when he replies.

I welcome the consensual tone of the Bill. I welcome the fact that we have allowed for the diversity in the school structure that will enable all schools, including maintain a role and to make a contribution to children's achievement. I welcome the obligation to provide school meals. When Northamptonshire was under Conservative control, the Conservatives scrapped the school meals service. As well as disadvantaging children who came from poor homes, the policy was bitterly resented by working mothers.

I also welcome the recognition that there must be a proper role for the local education authority. Above all, I welcome the improvement in achievement and school performance which I believe that the Bill will bring for our school children in the future.

9.7 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I am sure that, given her personal experience, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) will agree that, while resources are vital, ethos is perhaps even more important. That is why I want to direct my few remarks to one type of school: Church schools. I do so not because I am an education specialist, but because I have personal experience.

Two of my children attend a grant-maintained, state, Church primary school. Since they have been attending the school—which is housed in one of those grim, five or six-storey Victorian buildings which one sees in inner cities—I have been enormously impressed by the education that they are receiving in a grant-maintained Church school. I only wish to plead with both sides of the House in a non-party-political way to try to further the cause of those excellent schools, many of which are in inner-city areas.

The school which my children attend has the most extraordinary social mix of pupils, all of whom, whatever their background, receive a first-rate education.

Why is that? Sometimes, education spokesmen—not only Government spokesmen, but others as well— seem to be obsessed with academic standards. The philosophy contained in the White Paper and in others I have read over the years is one of "I learn, therefore I am," or even, "I perform, therefore I am," rather than one of trying to educate the whole person. We all have our personal pet theories about what is the real crisis in the classroom, or even whether there is such a crisis, but I believe that real the crisis in the classroom is a spiritual one—a crisis of meaning.

Research in Greenwich shows that the under-performance of white working-class boys is due in part to a lack of a sense of identity—they do not know who they are. We are selling our children short by failing to pass on to them any significant spiritual and cultural identity. Asian youngsters fare far better, thanks to their stronger sense of family and culture.

The first key stage 2 results showed that Church schools did significantly better than other schools—indeed, the top 64 schools in the league table were Church schools. Could that be, not because they are better resourced, or placed in middle-class areas, or have smaller classes than other schools—none of which is true—but because Church schools teach within a framework defined by a specific vision of the world and what it means to be human, and because they value people for what they are as well as for what they do?

In the midst of our information society, we need to educate our children to know which information is

about the war between Bosnians and Serbs, starvation in Ethiopia, or mental breakdown; we need to discover, rediscover and pass on to our children the importance of theology, philosophy and the arts, so that they can learn why there are wars, hunger, homelessness and anger, and seek to change human behaviour accordingly. It is vital to pupils' development that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development form a central part of the curriculum. In the process of doing that, we will answer the wider questions that are so important.

In that context, I welcome the fact that the Bill makes no changes to the provision for religious education and school worship in county schools. There are some who call for the requirement for daily Christian worship to be changed, but from my experience of seeing the assembly that my children attend, I think that such gatherings are inspiring and moving and do no harm at all. That is not only my view, but the view of 69 per cent. of the British public, as expressed in the British social attitudes surveys; only 10 per cent. of the public objected to daily school prayers.

Why should I be worried, when 90 per cent. of primary schools keep to the law on daily Christian assembly? That figure comes from the chief inspector of schools. However, although keeping to the law on assemblies is the norm in the nation's 20,000 primary schools, it is a different picture in the nation's 5,000 secondary schools. According to the chief inspector, instead of 90 per cent. compliance, 75 per cent. of secondary schools do not comply with the law as laid out in statute. Those schools may hold assemblies on some days of the week, but they are still in breach of the law.

I hope that the Minister will encourage those schools to do better and to conform to what the British public want. The Education Act 1944 introduced county schools, which three quarters of children now attend. Any reading of the parliamentary debates as that Bill was going through its stages will confirm the view that county schools were non-denominational, but were intended to be Christian schools, with Christian assemblies. We have to bear that always in mind.

Earlier this year, the Government got into a great deal of trouble when they attempted to cut the number of Church school governors, so that their majority was reduced to one on governing bodies. I am glad that the Government have relented and decided that in those schools the present majority of two or three foundation governors over all other governors should continue. That is fine, but there is a problem: the Bill ends grant-maintained status.

Under the Bill, every GM school must decide to become a community school, a foundation school or a voluntary school. The governing bodies of the Church grant-maintained schools of the type that I send my children to and that the Prime Minister sends his children to—I make no complaint about that: he is entitled to do so and I congratulate him on doing so—must decide which type of school they wish theirs to become.

Obviously, it would be impossible for such a school, with a clear denominational ethos, to become a community school, so the choice will be between a foundation school and a voluntary school. If a school becomes a foundation school, it need not raise the 15 per cent. for its capital spending—which is fine—but the five [illegible] outnumbered by the 15 other governors, so there is no guarantee that the religious ethos of the school can be maintained. I do not believe, therefore, that those schools will take that route. If, however, the school becomes a voluntary aided school, the foundation governors will be in the majority but the school must raise 15 per cent. of any capital spending.

Dick Turpin would accost his victims with the phrase,"Your money or your life." Grant-maintained schools are in a similar dilemma. They must choose between money or their ethos—their religious life. Why cannot they have, as they have in recent years, both enhanced flexibility on finance and control of their religious ethos?

9.15 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Nearly half of 11-year-olds leave primary school without reaching the expected standard for their age. That is a damning indictment of the previous Government and a massive challenge for the new Labour Government.

Reaching our new education targets will be no mean feat. By 2002, we want three quarters of 11-year-olds to reach the expected standards in maths and 80 per cent. to reach those in English. We do not want a generation of our children blighted in the labour market, failed by our education system. There is a growing wage gap between these who are skilled and those who are unskilled and poorly educated. Teachers will receive the help that they need to deliver our demanding education standards. Class sizes will be reduced, there will be additional training, and local education authorities will give support.

I have tremendous admiration for teachers, most of whom are dedicated, hard working, highly skilled and incredibly enthusiastic. However, a few cannot cope with the challenges in our classrooms. One such teacher left my daughter, at the age of six, literally bored to tears. She transformed a child who loved school into one who hated it.

Luckily, we resolved that problem within half a term, but such intervention should not be left to worried parents. Therefore I enthusiastically endorse the procedures to remove incompetent teachers from the classroom when all other measures to improve performance have failed.

That teacher was computer-phobic. She denied the class a vital tool for raising educational standards, in a school with a very deprived catchment area. I believe that on-line learning can really open up the curriculum to those who are left cold by traditional methods. I find it exciting that such technology can broaden horizons, not just for the most able but—perhaps even more important—for the least able. New technology is especially effective in getting through to pupils with special needs.

Two years ago, the Prime Minister said that the Labour Government would connect every school in Britain to the super-highway. That policy is now in place and those schools will be linked up free of charge. However, I believe that, under a Labour Government, we can do that much earlier, and that the United Kingdom can set the pace for schools in Europe and throughout the world.

My local education authority, Staffordshire, has scored a national first and has led the way in the use of information technology. It has set up its own learning net—the Staffordshire learning net—connecting all

[Charlotte Atkins]

education providers through learning centres. Those learning centres will be open not just to school and university students, but to the local community, which will make them—the schools and learning centres involved—the centre of their communities.

That will create tremendous opportunities for schools, other educational institutions and businesses, enabling them to work together to raise standards of literacy, numeracy and subject knowledge. That is much more productive than the old-style competitive culture fostered by the Tory Government, which divided schools and made them compete against each other and against other educational institutions. The learning net is bringing together the expertise of educational institutions, to the benefit of our pupils in Staffordshire.

We have home-grown computer software companies such as Europress, whose chairman lives in my constituency. Those companies are desperate to meet the challenge offered by Labour. They are presenting programs that will support educational standards in the classroom, and will replace many of the American programs that are so inappropriate for our schools. I believe that, under Labour, we will enter a really exciting time for educational progress.

9.22 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): This has been a full debate. Because of the length of the Bill, it has raised many questions—questions to which we hope the Minister will be able to give answers. In Committee, we shall not only seek further clarification, but try to persuade the Minister to alter some of the clauses. I hope that he is in a receptive mode—this being the time of year when wishes are granted—and I hope that, in this wonderful spirit of co-operation, he will listen to me when I say what I want for Christmas.

In the 1980s, it was right to introduce the national curriculum, and to set up more effective management systems to develop a more effective inspection arrangement and inform parents in a better way. The changes were necessary and useful. I am pleased to say that I quoted those words directly from the Government's White Paper, in which the Secretary of State promised not only to keep the changes made by the Conservative Government in the 1980s but to develop them. We welcome that. There are many things in the White Paper—and now in the Bill—that we will support, because they build on tried and tested changes in education that were introduced by the last Government.

It may be somewhat churlish of me—but why not?—to say that, at the time, it was the Labour party that opposed just about all those changes. We welcome the party's conversion, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said, but we will oppose the Bill—not because of the elements that I have mentioned, which we support, but because we believe that the Bill makes significant changes to the future of education that will damage children, parents and schools.

For one thing, the Bill significantly reduces choice. I do not just mean that that was introduced by the last Government; clearly, choice in education—the variety of schools, and the mix of schools—has proved successful in helping to drive up standards, and parents clearly want it. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have given examples to prove that parents—they themselves, as parents—have exercised choice, and they have been able to do so only because of the variety of schools that are now available thanks to the previous Government's policy.

The two types of secondary school that are under threat are grammar and grant-maintained schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said how much he, as a parent, valued the chance to chose a grant-maintained Church primary school for his children because of the school's ethos and the fact that it met the needs of parents looking for a school that replicated the parental view on religious education. That is important to many parents.

The Minister has modified the changes which the Bill will make to Church schools since the White Paper was first published. However, religious education and the ethos of a school are important. We have received representations, particularly from Catholic schools, which are nervous about their future. They want the opportunity to preserve and continue to offer that ethos in their schools, which parents have chosen for very good reasons.

Many questions about the future of grammar schools remain unanswered. I hope that the Minister will set our minds at rest, because many hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned grammar schools tonight. They are particularly concerned about the ballot and how it will be run. The Government often use words that are familiar to those of us with a marketing background. In Committee, we shall look for more than mere language; we shall look for action, and shall want to know exactly what that language means.

For example, if the Minister intends that a ballot will be used to determine a grammar school's future existence and portrays that method as a democratic process, we shall look beyond the words and will want to know just how democratic that process will be. We shall want to know who the Minister will select to take part in the ballot.

Clearly, ballots are in essence democratic, but the electorate who subscribe to a ballot could mean that a ballot has been rigged, for want of a better word, to ensure a certain outcome. We shall therefore look to the Government to ensure that actions follow their words. If ballots are to be truly democratic, the detail that is missing from the face of the Bill must be provided so that we can say that the Government are not totally against grammar schools, and the ballots will be democratic in the truest sense of the word.

We are also concerned about choices in other types of schools, particularly primary schools in rural areas. I have raised this matter with the Minister before, and other hon. Members have mentioned it tonight.

Under clause 33, schedule 7 gives the Secretary of State new reserve powers to direct local education authorities and governing bodies to make proposals for the "rationalisation of school places", and make such proposals himself. We seek clarification on that provision. because, although some small rural primary schools may not be full, to achieve the Government's objective of classes of no more than 30 pupils, they would be under threat of "rationalisation".

Some such primary schools teach across an age range of between 5 and 7. Small village primary schools should not be rationalised by simply closing one and making

parents transport their children to another, which is not of their choice and which may be in a village some distance away. The question of choice in primary schools is therefore in jeopardy. We want reassurance now and further reassurances in Committee.

Grammar schools were described by a Labour Member as an infernal institution. I attended such an infernal institution—

Mr. Willis: Look what it has done for you.

Mrs. Browning: Indeed. The Minister also attended such an institution, and the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) said that she had attended Cheltenham ladies college, which must have been a wonderful experience for her. For children such as myself, whose parents could not have afforded it but who were able to attend a grammar school, it was an opportunity that we would not otherwise have had.

Labour Members who have benefited from selective education, or from what they choose to call a privileged education because they were able to pay for it, should acknowledge that that variety and choice in our education system has been a strength. It would be a great pity if, merely for reasons of dogma and prejudice, the Bill deprived future generations of young people, regardless of parental income, of an opportunity to attend a school such as many of us have benefited from.

The future of grammar schools hangs in the balance, and we look to the Minister to reassure us. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), and my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) and for Salisbury (Mr. Key) particularly asked about the appropriate feeder schools and the relevant parents. They wanted to know the details that would determine the future of our grammar schools.

The other point on which we will divide the House is structure. When the Secretary of State brought the White Paper to the Floor of the House, he said that it was about standards, not structure.

Mr. Blunkett: It was.

Hon. Members: It is.

Mrs. Browning: Perhaps someone would like to bid that it will be. If the Bill is to be about standards, not structures, the Government will have to make significant changes to it in Committee. At present, it is all about structure. Almost 100 extra powers are given to the Secretary of State alone. That does not even include the additional powers—*[Interruption.]* It is Christmas, and Labour Members have obviously become power-crazed. They want more power, and they will vote themselves more power.

Nothing in the word "partnership" in a party or a Government implies power on that scale, yet all the way through the debate, we have heard the word "partnership"—another marketing term that we recognise. If the word means anything, it means sharing. The Government cannot share if they have taken all the power to themselves. We shall seek considerable changes to the Bill through amendments in Committee.

The Liberal Democrats say that they will vote with the Government tonight—*[Interruption.]*—constructive opposition indeed—even though their spokesman, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), expressed his concern about the amount of power—

Mr. Don Foster *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman nods in agreement. The Liberal Democrats are worried about the Bill, but they will still vote for it. That is the price of four seats around the Cabinet table. They will be with the Labour Government tonight in the Lobby.

The only people who do not seem to be concerned about the power are Labour Members, including those on the Front Bench. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) made a virtue of the additional powers that the Bill gives to the Secretary of State and the LEAs.

Mr. Barry Jones *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Browning: Clearly, we must examine the Bill carefully, to see whether those powers are justified or whether it is power for power's sake, as we believe it is. That is another reason why we shall oppose the Bill tonight.

Mr. Barry Jones: My right hon. Friend has taken the powers because the previous Government did not do what had to be done.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman should be very clear about where those powers are coming from. They are being taken not from Ministers or the Opposition, but from governors, parents, teachers and head teachers. That is not democracy.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend agree that, according to any objective assessment, education in this country since 1945 has suffered because a succession of Governments have taken power to the centre and changed the structure of education? By the time that the structure, which is reluctant to change, has finally accepted it, a new Government has been elected or a new fashion has come into vogue. The education professionals want to be allowed to get on with teaching rather than constantly reorganising.

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The huge structural changes in the Bill will affect teachers, governing bodies and particularly parents who had taken decisions at a local level and must now re-adapt to the new conditions. Education will be accountable to others, including unelected bodies.

The Opposition are also concerned about the cost of the changes. Any change, however benign, usually involves some form of inherent cost. The additional powers that the Secretary of State seeks through the Bill and the additional responsibilities for LEAs will have cost implications. However, specific sums of money are not allocated to meeting those costs. Clearly, the changes that the Government are introducing in the Bill will be funded from the eduction budget—and that is particularly worrying.

[Mrs. Browning]

At the beginning of the debate, the Secretary of State said, "We have the resources to honour our manifesto commitment." However, there will clearly be a shortfall in the education budget in meeting that manifesto commitment. That point is spelled out in the internal memorandum from the Department for Social Security which has received newspaper coverage in the past 24 or 48 hours.

I shall quote from one paragraph that is relevant to education. In its memorandum to Government Departments, including the Department of Education, the DSS says:

"As you know, DSS—in common with all other Departments—is conducting a Comprehensive Spending Review. The Government has made clear its aim to release resources from social security in order to spend more on health and education and it is likely that a high proportion of the necessary savings will have to come"—

[Interruption.]—it is a memo all the same—

"from benefits paid to sick and disabled people, including compensatory benefits for industrial injuries."

Either the right hon. Gentleman has not squared his departmental budget with the Chancellor, or the Government have only just discovered the additional costs inherent in the Bill—particularly those associated with the administration and bureaucracy that the new powers will require. The Government must now consider taking money from disability benefit in order to meet the departmental budget. *[Interruption.]*

Labour Members are moaning and groaning. I assure them that this is the second time—

Ms Hodge: It is not true.

Mrs. Browning: I had a meeting with the Secretary of State for Social Security on Thursday evening as part of the all-party disability group. When the memorandum was read to her, she had the opportunity to deny its implications, but she would not do so. The hon. Lady should not say that it is not true, when the Secretary of State chose categorically not to deny it on Thursday night.

Ms Hodge: I was saying that it was not true because the hon. Lady is frightening people who are in genuine need because of their disabilities with the threat that their needs will not be properly met by the Government, when they will be.

Mrs. Browning: I say to the hon. Lady for the second time from the Opposition Dispatch Box in three weeks that, if what I am saying is not true, and if she believes that it is frightening people, let the Prime Minister, in the Chamber or outside this place, deny what I am alleging. The right hon. Gentleman has refused so far to do so.

We are talking of costs and the dissipation of the education budget, which means that moneys will not be going where they are really needed, which is into the classroom. These are reasons why we shall not support the Bill. We know that there is a shortfall in the part of the budget which the Government said would come from the assisted places scheme. The argument has been supported by the Institute of Public Finance.

It is clear that there are many shortfalls in the Bill, and we look forward to the opportunity in Committee of trying to persuade the Government to change their mind. We look to the Minister tonight to answer the many questions that we have put to the Government. I shall recap on some of those questions to which we are urgently seeking answers. Will the Minister limit the frequency of ballots on the future of grammar schools? If parents can vote for the abolition of grammar schools, why can they not vote for their introduction? Is the Minister to say this evening, "That's it, they will all wither on the vine"?

Will the Minister guarantee that the only individuals who will be able to vote on the future of grammar schools are those parents who have children attending those schools? Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House how many parents need to sign a petition to force a ballot on the future of grammar schools? Will he inform us also in what circumstances he would declare the result of a ballot null and void?

We would like to know also how many jobs will be lost as a result of the abolition of the funding agency with responsibility for schools. How many new employees will local education authorities have to take on to cope with the additional administrative costs resulting from the incorporation of GM schools into the state sector?

May we also have details of how much it will cost LEAs to draw up the early years development plan and education development plan? How much will it cost the taxpayer to pay for the ballots on the future of grammar schools? How much does the Minister expect the ballots on the future status of BM schools to cost? If the hon. Gentleman can give us all these costings, perhaps he will tell us also where the money will come from.

9.41 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): I shall try to answer some of the questions of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mr. Browning), but in the minute or two that I have lost I may miss one or two of them. I will respond in writing to the questions that I do not cover in my reply.

I thank all those Members who have taken part in the debate, and I offer my commiserations to those Back-Bench Members who have not been able to make their contributions. I know from personal experience how frustrating it can be to sit in the Chamber for hours on end listening to other Members' speeches when, of course, the best speech of the evening would have been one's own, which failed to be delivered.

The Government are committed to building a modern Britain and a decent society. To achieve that, we shall need a world-class schools system. The Bill will play an important part in ensuring that we can have an education system that meets the needs of our children and our country. I am prepared to recognise—and take great pleasure in doing so—the vital role played by teachers in achieving that aim. Many teachers do a good job, often in difficult circumstances, and when we have a chance to debate an education measure such as this Bill, it is entirely appropriate that we should applaud those teachers who are doing such good work.

When the White Paper was published, the Government were prepared to listen. As a result of that consultation, we have made certain changes to our original proposals. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) referred to one or two changes that we made in relation to Church schools—changes that have been warmly welcomed. I was concerned to hear the observations from the

shadow Minister to the effect that concerns are still felt about Roman Catholic schools. I was unaware of such concerns. Cardinal Hume has written to say how pleased he is personally with the way in which the Government have responded to the observations of Roman Catholic schools. If the shadow Minister will provide details, I am sure that we, the Government, will be prepared to take them up.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend the shadow Minister may have been worried about the subject that I raised. I shall be grateful for the Minister's response because many parents are concerned. What of the Church grant-maintained primary schools, which will be forced into choosing to become secular foundation schools or to return to the status of voluntary-aided schools, which means that they will have to raise 15 per cent. of their finance? At present, they have the advantage of being denominational schools and not having to raise that finance. Will the Minister comment on that powerful point?

Mr. Byers: I am happy to do so. It is important for Members to recognise that every school will be able to choose its category—either immediately in respect of the majority of grant-maintained schools or within 12 or 18 months in respect of all other schools. Although there will be an indicative allocation at the beginning, it will not be for ever, and schools will be able to choose their final categories. We are able to offer that reassurance to the small, grant-maintained Church of England primary schools to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

We have made changes to reflect the concerns of the Churches and many other organisations and groups, but we accept that we cannot meet all those concerns. That applies to all consultation. Not everyone says the same thing, and there are different views and opinions about the direction in which the Government should go. As a result of the changes that have been introduced arising from the White Paper consultation, we now have a far better Bill than we had originally—one that will meet the needs of our children. The Bill carries forward our ambitious agenda in government to put in place our historic pledge to reduce infant class sizes to 30 or fewer. We want to get the basics right, and that means starting in the early years of education.

The Bill puts schools in the forefront of our drive to raise standards, but provides LEAs with a clear challenge to help them. We want to establish a genuine partnership. Schools want candid friends, but they do not want outside control, which will not happen as a result of the measures in the Bill.

The Bill also demonstrates the Government's readiness to take their share of responsibility at every level. The education action zones call for radical and original ideas. We want to liberate local initiative to solve local problems and to help to build the schools of the next century.

The Bill also modernises the 1944 settlement. Too much time and energy has been wasted on exploring divisions in the system, leaving not enough for thinking about what can unite us in raising standards and extending opportunities.

Mr. Ian Bruce: May I raise one matter which would have been in the speech that I did not make? How will the Government determine the allocation of money for special pleadings, such as reducing class sizes, when the standard spending assessment in counties such as Dorset is always overspent and more money goes in, yet inner cities that keep being given more money never spend the total standard spending assessment? How will the Government determine who gets the money and who does not?

Mr. Byers: I can understand why the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), with his majority of 77, raises such very local issues. Let us look at the facts.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Answer the question.

Mr. Byers: I shall take great pleasure in doing so. The hon. Gentleman says that Dorset is being discriminated against in favour of inner-city authorities. In the settlement made by this Government, Dorset received a 6 per cent. increase in its education standard spending assessment over and above the national average of 5.7 per cent. For the first time in many years—certainly since the hon. Member for South Dorset was elected in 1987—new money is coming into schools in his constituency and in Dorset.

The shadow Secretary of State attacked the basic principle that he felt underpinned the Bill—a greater degree of centralisation. We believe that the basic principle is not centralisation but, in fact, decisive Government action—*[Interruption.]* Whereas Conservative Members were prepared to stand to one side and see a local education authority such as Hackney failing to deliver education to the 30,000 children in Hackney—

Mr. Hayes: Labour Hackney.

Mr. Byers: It does not matter whether it is Labour Hackney or not. Without fear or favour, we shall intervene to protect children in any local education authority. That is what we are prepared to do. When an authority fails to discharge its legal duties, as was the case in Hackney, this Government will not stand to one side. The previous Government washed their hands of any responsibility; this Government will not. There were 30,000 reasons for the intervention that we made in Hackney: the 30,000 children who are educated in Hackney. We have a responsibility to those children, and it is one that we shall discharge.

Mr. Dorrell: Do I take it, therefore, that the Minister no longer believes, as he did in 1993, that

"all our experience clearly shows that nationalisation, and the dead hand of Whitehall, lead to a universal system up and down the country, rather than the diversity that the Government pretend to favour."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 179.]

Has he changed his mind?

Mr. Byers: I am always prepared to change my mind if I am wrong. In fact, however—I had the opportunity to refresh my memory when I left the debate for an hour—in the debate in 1993 the situation was quite different.

In this Bill, we are not prescribing how LEAs or schools are to improve standards. We are laying down targets to raise standards. It will be for local education authorities and individual schools to decide how they

[Mr. Byers]

reach those targets. They will be monitored against their performance, but we will not intervene. We will promote best practice and show what works well. It is only right that we should do that. It will not be imposed on anybody. We shall encourage and assist them to raise standards in schools.

That is totally counter to the Education Act 1993, which centralised control in the hands of the Secretary of State for Education. In fact, more than 400 new powers were given as a result of that measure. There are a modest 100 or so in this Bill. Those powers are there for a reason: to ensure that there will be no hiding place for under-performance—whether in schools, local education authorities or, yes, in government. We have a Secretary of State for Education and Employment who is prepared to be judged on raising standards, and a ministerial team who support him in that objective.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Will the Minister explain why, if the Secretary of State will not be prescribing what happens in schools and LEAs, it is necessary for him to take powers to monitor and change what LEAs and schools put in their education development plan?

Mr. Byers: It is for the simple reason that the education development plan will be the way in which we monitor levels of performance. Targets will be set for LEAs—but we set targets for ourselves in government as well. We have been prepared to say that the present system, which we inherited after 18 years of the hon. Lady's party being in power, in which just 57 per cent. of 11-year-olds attained the required level in English and 54 per cent. did so in mathematics, is unacceptable. That is why we have said that at the end of the Parliament we want 80 per cent. of 11-year-olds to reach the required level in English and 75 per cent. to do so in mathematics. We are prepared to be judged on meeting those targets. We have said that LEAs need to be set targets as well. Indeed, in partnership with schools, LEAs need to set school-based targets.

We make no apology for adopting a system in which people are clearly accountable. This is not command and control; it is ensuring that we raise standards in our schools and give our children the best possible start. The previous Government washed their hands of that responsibility. We shall not do that.

Some concerns have been raised about how the infant class size pledge will be implemented. We are confident that, with the measures contained in the Bill and with the resources that we will get from the phasing out of the assisted places scheme, we will deliver that pledge. The pledge is that, by September 2001, no child of five, six or seven will be in a class of more than 30 pupils. That pledge is central to our standards agenda and it will be delivered, in contrast to what happened under the previous Administration.

We now have more than 500,000 primary schoolchildren in classes of more than 30 and the figure has continued to escalate. In 1992, 25 per cent. of primary school pupils were in classes of more than 30. That was bad enough, but in 1997, after five years of neglect, 33 per cent. of primary schoolchildren were in classes of more than 30.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned Devon. Five years ago, under the Conservative Administration, 28 per cent. of Devon primary schoolchildren were in classes of 30 or more, and the figure is now 38 per cent.

Mrs. Browning: Under Liberal Democrat control.

Mr. Byers: I blame central Government for not introducing a system that could deliver on the pledge. The Bill will ensure that, whoever is in control locally—Conservatives, Liberal Democrats or Labour—the pledge will be delivered, because children should not be subject to a local lottery to decide whether they are in smaller classes. We will deliver on our pledge.

Mrs. Browning: My constituency has many old rural schools which have Victorian campuses with no room for extra classrooms. If children at those schools have to bus seven or 10 miles in the early morning and at half-past three in the afternoon, to the next village because the existing primary school cannot accommodate them—and that is what will happen—their parents will not thank the Minister or the Labour party.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Lady has missed an important part of our proposals to deliver our pledge. The recurrent spending will be funded by the phasing out of the assisted places scheme. I take the point that some money will also need to be spent on buildings, and that is why the new deal capital made available in the Budget on 2 July will provide additional resources to ensure that that can happen.

In relation to the school framework, several concerns were raised about the ballots for grammar school status and the retention of a selective system. I assure the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) that, although technical regulations may not be ready in time for consideration of the Bill in Committee, we will make a full statement on our proposals, so that the policy will be clearly outlined at the relevant stage. It would be inappropriate to have technical legal regulations ready at that stage, but we will be able to answer all the specific questions that have been raised this evening.

We are still consulting, and I had a useful meeting with hon. Members who represent constituencies in Buckinghamshire about the particular problems faced by that area. I would be especially interested to meet the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) to discuss the issue that he raised earlier about North Yorkshire. It is clear that all 164 grammar schools are in a different situation, and we must ensure that we have the right approach for each of those schools.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way at this stage in the debate. If he will not publish the draft technical regulations, will he give an assurance that he will publish, before the relevant Committee stage, a statement of the principles that will determine the myriad regulations for which the Bill paves the way?

Mr. Byers: I am happy to give an undertaking that, when we get to the relevant Committee stage, we will give a clear statement of our approach to the regulations for grammar schools.

The Government inherited a bitter legacy from 18 years of Conservative Government. We inherited a school system with no sense of direction, lacking in confidence and under-resourced. That has to change—and as a result of this Bill it will change. We will cut class sizes for infants. We will provide a nursery place for every four-year-old. We will provide more than £1 billion for school building. This is a radical agenda from a radical, reforming Government. The Bill is based on education excellence for all and raising standards in our schools. It will bring glad tidings of comfort and joy to parents throughout the country. I commend the Bill to the House.

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 142.

Division No. 125] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Wicks, Malcolm
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike

Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Sir David Madel.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

SCHOOL STANDARDS AND FRAMEWORK BILL [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the School Standards and Framework Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required for the making by the Secretary of State of grants or loans under the Act;

(b) any other expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable by virtue of any other Act; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Withernsea and South-East Holderness

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

10.11 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley and Holderness): I am very grateful indeed to have the opportunity to raise what I consider to be a matter of some importance to my constituency: the difficulties of the town of Withernsea and of—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Will hon. Members please not hold a Christmas party at this moment?

Mr. Cran: I am very grateful indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was manfully doing my best under the circumstances.

The problem is serious; it is not one of which I have first-hand knowledge, in the sense of having lived with it since I have been the Member of Parliament for Beverley, because I inherited the area at the most recent boundary commission change; but I am becoming increasingly concerned about what I have seen in the town, and about the fact that, as far as I can see, the problem has simply been ignored by almost every agency that could possibly exist for the benefit and help of such towns and areas.

What has occurred is simply a downward spiral of economic and social decline. The town and the area are unable to get out of that spiral on their own. I am grateful to see the Minister here. She knows something about the issue, because she has written to me on the subject, so what I hear will at least be first hand.

The Minister knows that I am concerned about the condition of the town. I could spend a long time outlining the indices of deprivation, but I shall confine myself to noting that, on any such index, the town is at the bottom, if the bottom is the worst. Unemployment in the area is the highest in East Yorkshire and, I suspect, for quite a way around. The number of cars per household shows the same situation, and long-term illness is the worst not only in my constituency but in the whole of East Yorkshire. The quality of housing is, alas, not what it should be: local tax figures show that housing is all in the lower bands. Almost more sadly, educational attainment is below that in the rest of the area. No one can be other than concerned about that.

In passing, I note that I probably did not get many votes from the town and the area, but that does not matter. We must consider such problems in a non-political way. As soon as I saw the problems, I was determined to do what I could to bring them to the attention of those who can take decisions that might change the situation. Despite the fact that there is great willingness for self-help, there are no pump-priming resources to help people to develop a strategy for tourism. After all, it was one of the great towns of Victorian England that grew up at the seaside to serve as holiday resorts for cities such as Hull.

Community spirit undoubtedly still exists, but I worry that, if all the town's requests for help continue to be refused, people will come to the likes of me and ask what is the point of going to the next port of call for further representations. I am trying desperately hard to get them to understand that we have to keep going. It is only by speaking to the Minister that we can bring the problems to the attention of the Government.

People tell me, rightly, that millions of pounds were spent to help our great cities when they were in decline. I have no difficulty with that proposition. The nearest city to my constituency, the great city of Kingston upon Hull, got hundreds of millions of pounds. The difference that that has made in the past 20 years has been as chalk and cheese to what has happened only a few miles down the road. Withernsea is a much smaller community of about 6,000 people. It has fallen through every resource net that I can think of. The result is the decline that we are discussing.

I am pleased that the Minister nods. That shows that she knows the problems of such areas. The problem is illustrated by the fact that Swanland in my old constituency qualifies for European regional development funds, but, for reasons that I will never understand, Withernsea, with all its problems, has no access to them. I suspect that arbitrary lines were drawn on a map. I dare say that it was done under the Government whom I supported at the general election, but that does not mean that it is right; it clearly is not. That is why I hope that the Minister and all the other decision takers will look at the matter dispassionately and, if such situations can occur, ask what in heaven's name they can do to reorient policy to help such communities.

As I have already said, the community spirit exists. I am pleased to say that the belief in self-help is also present, which I find quite extraordinary given what I have seen in the town, and the difficulties that it has faced and still suffers. The Minister will be aware of the Withernsea 2000 partnership, which aims to consolidate the views of the key decision takers in the area—the East Yorkshire council, the training and enterprise council, the Yorkshire tourist board, the town council and even individuals.

I am delighted to say that there also entrepreneurs in the town who want to contribute something to help the process of regeneration. They simply cannot do that on their own; they need a helping hand to offer not just encouragement but resources. In the scheme of such things, the resources necessary are not that great, but the area needs such pump priming.

The Minister also knows better than anyone else that Withernsea entered, meritoriously, the rural challenge competition for the second time. It was the only bid that came from East Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire, but again the town's bid failed. I can do no better than read from the letter that was sent to me on 25 November by the Minister for the Environment, who stated:

"I thought I should write to let you know that East Riding of Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire's Turning the Tide—Withernsea bid has been unsuccessful in this year's round of Rural Challenge. The competition, which is sponsored on our behalf by the Rural Development Commission, aims to encourage innovative partnerships and new ideas for regeneration of the countryside."

The outcome of that competition is wonderful for the area that won because it will be able to use whatever plans it has for the regeneration of its particular neck of the woods, but we are on our tod yet again.

We drew some comfort from the Minister's letter, in which he also wrote:

"Officials from the Commission are ready to discuss with the partnership the outcome of the competition and whether it may be possible to provide support for the project by alternative means."

[Mr. Cran]

The words "alternative means" are important, because I understand that the other sources of finance available to the Rural Development Commission require matching funding. I understand perfectly well why that condition is part of the deal, but I regret to say that, apart from East Yorkshire council, there is not much matching funding of any significant proportion to be had in the town or the surrounding area. I dare say some exists, but it is simply not available in the amounts required to liberate funds of any size from the commission.

On the basis of the Minister's letter, I went hot foot to see the director of operations at the RDC, and we had a constructive meeting. I do not believe that I betray any confidence when I say that he explained to me exactly why towns such as Withernsea have such problems. I do not believe that I betray any confidence if I say that he understood exactly the position of places such as Withernsea.

What do we do about that? Again, I do not believe I am betraying any confidence between us when I recount how said that he would do his best within tight resources to see whether there was money here, there or wherever that could be liberated for a strategy to develop the town's tourist potential or small businesses in the town. He was keen to try to do that, but he spent some time pointing out to me that he, too, has difficulties with the schemes that he and the RDC operate. None the less, I took from that meeting the fact that the Rural Development Commission was not going to walk away from the situation, but would look for ways to help the town.

I understand that the Withernsea partnership has had a meeting with the regional RDC. I have not had a report of the meeting's outcome; if the Minister has received a report, perhaps she could tell me what happened. We need to know whether the regional officials mirrored the conversation that I had with the director of operations, who sounded a constructive note and said that the RDC would try to find ways to help.

I could say a great deal more about the details of the case, but I am keen to hear what the Minister has to say rather than to listen to myself. I should like to hear from the Minister that she recognises the problem that I have outlined and the fact that the town cannot succeed on its own; I should also like to hear that the Government will not walk away from the situation and related problems elsewhere.

I hope that the hon. Lady will consider meeting the members of the Withernsea partnership. It will be difficult for them to get down here, as the town is not flush with money, but they will be in Whitehall if the Minister is prepared to meet them. It would be even better if, when she was passing nearby—I am not suggesting a particular date or time—she came to see for herself the difficulties in the area. It would be as much of an education for her as, without doubt, it has been for me.

On one of his tours, the Prince of Wales managed to come along. I was not privy to what he thought, but people who were present have suggested to me that he did not particularly like what he saw. I hope that the Minister will consider all those points. I also hope, more importantly, that she will be open minded about the policy framework. If we have a competition—I understand that it existed under the previous Government—from which only one winner can emerge, that poses significant difficulties for all the other partnerships that have put together good plans. What happens to them? We clearly have to look at this policy stance. If the result on 1 May had been different, I would have been giving exactly the same speech to a Conservative Minister.

I hope that I have outlined the problems—I think that the Minister knows them herself. Confidence is important in such situations, and it is easy for confidence to ebb away from the community so that people say to themselves that there is nothing they can do and nobody is interested in their condition, so they might as well pack up shop. That means that those who are prepared to shove the thing along and do something about the community spirit all melt into the background and the situation becomes worse. I do not think that that will happen, but it could, and I should like to avert that.

I am a pretty right-wing character in the political framework, but I am not particularly daft, and when I see the position that exists in Withernsea I know perfectly well that there is no alternative to the pump priming that only Government can provide.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran) on raising this extremely important subject and on managing to acquire the last Adjournment debate before Christmas. I cannot act exactly like Santa Claus for him tonight, but I want to emphasise that I have listened carefully to what he has had to say about Withernsea, and I should like to thank him for bringing the issue to the attention of the House.

The problems are difficult and of quite long standing, so they will be hard to address, but I want to be as encouraging as possible in the face of the disappointment suffered by the partnership as a result of the recent decision on rural challenge. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman would regard this as encouraging, but I would certainly be very happy to meet a delegation from the area—as he suggests. If they get in touch with my office, we can put that in train and discuss where they might be able to go from here.

I come from the east coast of Yorkshire. I was born just up the way in Bridlington, so I appreciate the uniqueness of that part of the country—its beauties as well as its problems. In part, its unspoilt character and remoteness add to its difficulties in terms of economic regeneration. When preparing for the debate, I noticed that the area lost its last railway link in 1964 as part of the Beeching cuts, so the decline has been going on for some time, and it will not be arrested overnight. There has also been a change in the nature of tourism in the United Kingdom. Some would say that the glory days of seaside resorts are long gone, but it is certain that the change in the pattern of tourism has presented many areas with difficult strategic choices.

As a Government, I hope that we can put in place programmes and policies that alleviate the problems of areas such as Withernsea and south-east Holderness. I know that the people there must have been disappointed not to secure resources under rural challenge, but I want to provide some encouragement tonight. The hon.

Gentleman admitted honestly that, in a competition, there are winners and losers; that is certainly the case with rural challenge. Of the 17 national entrants to the competition, only six were chosen and there was an allocated share of £5 million, so many more areas were disappointed than were celebrating.

I want to spend a few minutes focusing on the many strengths of Withernsea's bid, because I strongly believe that within the bid lie the seeds of Withernsea's recovery. First, there was its strong partnership approach: a solid partnership has been established and that can be built on. It includes all the key local partners, including the local authority, Humberside training and enterprise council, English Partnerships and the voluntary sector. A report in the *Yorkshire Post* dated 3 December suggests that the partnership will look at ways of moving forward some of the projects without rural challenge support. I would encourage that.

It is possible that various elements of the bid could be successfully supported through the Rural Development Commission's rural development programme, which is available to the partnership and which will support worthwhile economic and community projects developed by the public, voluntary and private sectors. It will be for the partnership to decide which priorities it wants to push and how they will fit into the rural development programme strategy and meet the objectives relating to Withernsea.

I understand that, as the hon. Gentleman said, the RDC has already met the rural challenge partners and encouraged them to revisit the bid and consider which projects could be progressed through that programme. I know that the hon. Gentleman has lent his support to the partnership and will do all he can to ensure that its good work continues.

Secondly, community capacity building is another of the bid's strengths that should be concentrated on in future. I congratulate the partnership on attempting a solution to Withernsea's problems that is based on people. I am aware that a formal consultation process was established during the rural challenge bid process, and I would like that to continue. The partnership acknowledges that the capacity of the community is low; I suggest that that be made an immediate priority. As the hon. Gentleman said, community confidence and economic regeneration are inextricably linked—neither can happen without the other. As a Yorkshirewoman, I am aware that it is a proud area—the community has the will to become involved, but the solution will be neither quick nor easy.

Thirdly, the bid contained a strong private sector input and I was impressed that the partnership did not simply rely on a tourism-based solution to the area's problems. The mass tourism market in the United Kingdom has changed, and the tourists who flocked to Withernsea in their tens of thousands in the 1950s and 1960s are not coming back in the same numbers. I live in New Brighton, which is in a similar position. Withernsea's decline has been gradual, so there needs to be effective private sector investment to turn the situation around.

I realise that, without rural challenge funding, the improvements will take longer to effect, but I know that the key economic partners—the local authority, Humberside training and enterprise council, English Partnerships and the RDC—have started the process, and are keen to keep it going. There is much to build on and much that can be retrieved from the bid for the benefit of the people of Withernsea.

Mr. Cran: As I understand it, a number of proposals can be retrieved from the bid, but the problem is the issue of matching funding. Can the Minister give us any hope there?

Angela Eagle: Matching funding is certainly required, and we would have to work with local partners to see where that could be got from. Perhaps we should place that subject on the agenda of the meeting that I have just offered. Certainly the local authority would have to give some priority to the area if we were to try to put together some moneys to make progress possible. I know that English Partnerships has a development of small industrial sites in the area, but it is 70 per cent. empty, so we must do more to generate interest and involvement.

I want to say something about how Government policy will help the economic development of Withernsea. We are putting forward policies to help the regions. We strongly believe that the future success of the English regions depends on the co-operation and participation of the entire community. With that in mind, we have set five key priorities.

The first priority is integration. One of our major steps was to integrate the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport. That enables us to concentrate on infrastructure developments of the type that are strategically important to Withernsea's recovery.

The second priority is decentralisation, which could also be important. We said in our manifesto that local decision making should be made more accountable to local people. The regional development agencies are a key element in our plans to achieve that.

The third priority is regeneration. We believe that this is not confined to making physical improvements to the infrastructure; it is equally important to regenerate communities, improve the social fabric and foster equality and cohesion.

The fourth priority is partnership. We must work in partnership with the public and private sectors and the voluntary sector to make our policies most effective. There are already many good examples of local partnerships in the region and I feel, as a result of what I know of Withernsea, that a very promising example of such a partnership has been developed locally.

The fifth priority is sustainability. Sustainable development must be built into all our policies, which means combining economic goals with environmental and social ones—improving people's quality of life and helping them to achieve their potential while making sensible use of natural resources.

Government policy will ensure that areas such as Withernsea and south-east Holderness can play an effective role in economic development at regional level. The index of deprivation is being updated. It will recognise need at three levels: district, ward and enumeration district. That should allow Withernsea to register at least as an area of concern in a much more obvious way than may have been the case in the past.

We are conducting a comprehensive review of regeneration spending with the aim of recognising needs at these levels and creating policies that can address them,

[Angela Eagle]

or at least allow regional development agencies to address them. RDAs will have a remit to regenerate areas of need—such as Withernsea—in their geographical areas. Other initiatives, such as welfare to work, capital receipts, employment and health initiatives, may be tied together to create a package to take Withernsea forward.

We continue to assess and evaluate the impact of our programmes, and we are looking forward and starting the process of considering how regeneration policies should be shaped for the future. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning recently launched a consultation paper entitled "The Way Forward", which is intended to facilitate a debate on the future of Government regeneration programmes. I know that the East Riding of Yorkshire council and the local partnership will want to comment on the proposals and play a full part in the consultation process to ensure that the needs of Withernsea and similar areas are taken fully into account in regeneration programmes of the future.

Many of the themes discussed in the paper are those that the Withernsea partnership addressed in its rural challenge bid, which will stand it in excellent stead in future. There is, for example, the need for a strategic approach. The challenge bid was strategy based; it employed a targeted approach to regeneration, which is vital to ensuring that the activity is properly focused and has local impact. We intend any future regeneration programme to be strategy led.

We are pleased to note that local partners are beginning to pull together to try to improve their prospects. I spoke earlier about the need for effective partnerships. Community involvement is also important: Withernsea and south-east Holderness must continue to develop community capacity. That is the key to long-term sustainable development.

As I said, there are other areas that we may be able to bring to bear on the problem—welfare to work, for example. We hope that that will begin to turn the tide in the area and that our proposals will assist Withernsea with programmes targeted on more isolated areas. The focus for welfare to work is the young unemployed; the worst consequence of unemployment is its effects on the human spirit.

Work has already started in Withernsea that will ensure provision of a high-quality programme for the young unemployed. The local Employment Service office has set up a rural East Riding specialist strand to present suggestions as to how to help the more isolated communities. All providers under the new deal—whether they are in the voluntary sector, in further education or private sector training providers—have been asked by the local Employment Service office to come up with plans to help unemployed clients in rural areas. Community and distance learning packages will also be available. Providers are located across the district and will therefore be well placed to meet the needs of clients in rural and coastal areas.

We are determined that welfare to work should make a real and tangible contribution to the improvement of the economy. Strengthening the capacity of the English regions to address the issues will also be important to ensuring that, strategically, areas such as Withernsea—which time has passed by and which are never big enough to attract attention—will have the prospect of being taken into account at regional development agency level. We trust that packages will be put together to help to give hope.

As I have said, we believe that there are firm foundations in the bid on which to build—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, till Monday 12 January, pursuant to Resolution [15 December].*

Adjourned at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 December 1997

TREASURY

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimate of the effect on the PSBR in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, and *(c)* 1999–2000 of the new estimates of GDP growth for such years contained in the "Pre-Budget Report, November 1997". [19957]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The new forecast of the PSBR, incorporating the new projections of GDP growth, are set out in Table B6 of the "Pre-Budget Report, November 1997".

Mr. Malcom Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000 which would result from an upward revision to the projected growth of gross domestic product for each of these years from the figure of 1.75 per cent. contained in Table B2, page 98, of the "Pre-Budget Report, November 1997", to a rate of 2.25 per cent. per annum. [19756]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* Ready reckoner estimates of the effect on the PSBR of changes to GDP growth are published in Treasury Occasional Paper, No. 4, "Public Finances and The Cycle".

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in all future financial statement and budget reports and pre-budget reports, cash estimates of the cyclically-adjusted public sector borrowing requirement on a current balance basis; and if he will make a statement. [19933]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The July 1997 Financial Statement and Budget Report, and the Pre-Budget Report, both included charts of the cyclically-adjusted current balance as a percentage of GDP. The Pre-Budget Report discussion paper, "A Code for Fiscal Stability", suggested that the Code should require the Government to publish a wider range of reports and information on the economic and fiscal outlook, including estimates of the cyclically-adjusted fiscal position. The Government are inviting comments on the proposals in that paper.

Money Laundering

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to make the Financial Services Authority responsible for giving advice to and monitoring the performance of financial institutions in relation to money laundering; and what resources he will make available for this purpose. [20122]

Mrs. Liddell: We intend that the FSA's statutory objectives should include monitoring, detecting and preventing financial crime. The FSA is funded by charges on the industry.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast of the total community charge and council tax receipts in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [20551]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Government's estimates of these receipts were included in Table S2.4 in "The Economy and Public Finances: Supplementary Material" to the Pre-Budget Report which was published on 25 November. A copy of this was placed in the Library of the House.

Orion Trust

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the transfer of legal interest in the 2.95 million TransTec shares to the Orion Trust took place; and if they were stamped by the Stamp Office of the Inland Revenue; [20914]

(2) if the Paymaster General guaranteed the payment of loans to *(a)* Stenbell Ltd. and *(b)* Orion Trust. [20964]

(3) if he will publish the advice given to the Paymaster General by Titmuss Samien Declient and Wilden Coe about the transaction between Orion Trust and Stenbel Ltd; [20919]

(4) when Stenbell *(a)* purchased the rights to 9,805,550 shares in TransTec plc, *(b)* exercised those rights and *(c)* sold the shares in TransTec to the Orion Trust; [20924]

(5) how Stenbell Ltd. financed the purchase and exercise of the rights to 9,805,550 shares in TransTec plc from the Paymaster General; [20925]

(6) who was the beneficial owner of the 2.95 million TransTec shares prior to their transfer into the Orion Trust; [20922]

(7) what factors led the Paymaster General not to transfer into his blind trust, the legal title to the whole of the amount owing to him beneficially by Stenbell Ltd.; [20921]

(8) if he will publish the Deed of Addition settling 2.95 million TransTec shares into the Orion Trust; [20918]

(9) if the shares in TransTec plc. owned by Stenbell Ltd. were offered to potential buyers other than the Orion Trust; [20923]

(10) if the Orion Trust holds assets through a controlled body corporate; [20920]

(11) if he will publish the transfer documents relating to the 2.95 million TransTec shares settled into the Orion Trust. [20913]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers I gave on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *575–76*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Enlargement

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Russian Federation on the security implications for the Kaliningrad enclave of the proposed enlargement of the EU; and if he will make a statement. [20466]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: None.

Land Mines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information her Department has collated regarding casualties being caused in Egypt by land mines laid during World War II. [20632]

Mr. Fatchett: None. The only figures available are those quoted by the Egyptian authorities.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to his Department by the Egyptian Government concerning land mines laid by the United Kingdom. [20633]

Mr. Fatchett: The British Embassy in Cairo have a continuing dialogue with the Egyptian authorities about land mines laid during the second world war. In 1996, we donated £500,000 of mine clearance equipment to the Egyptians from the aid budget. A further £100,000 is earmarked during the current financial year for additional mine clearing equipment.

DEFENCE

Chinook ZD576

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current location of the wreckage of Chinook ZD576; what plans he has to dispose of it; and if he will make a statement. [20818]

Mr. Spellar: The wreckage of Chinook ZD576 is currently stored at the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation at Fleetlands and will be retained for as long as necessary, taking into account the views of the next of kin, and any outstanding claims for compensation.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19968]

Mr. Spellar: I regret that in putting together the answer to this question it has become apparent that there was an error in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend's previous question on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *391*. The figure did not include the reappointments which had been made to the Register of Members of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council, one of MOD's advisory Non Departmental Public Bodies, and it included a paid employee at the Fleet Air Arm Museum. The correct figure should therefore have been 68, of which 58, or 85 per cent. receive remuneration.

The names, positions and remuneration of the 68 appointees are as follows:

Public body	*Position*	*Name*	*Remuneration*
RAF Museum	Trustee	Lord Frederick Waterpark	Unpaid
	Trustee	Baroness Emily Blatch CBE	Unpaid
	Trustee	Mr. L. A. Edwards BSc MBA Ceng FRAeS	Unpaid
	Trustee	Lord Hector Monro AE, JP, DL	Unpaid
Royal Marines Museum	Chairman of Trustees	Lt. General Sir Henry Beverley KCB	Unpaid
	Trustee	Mr. J. R. Kenroy	Unpaid
Royal Navy Submarine Museum	Trustee	Mr. Robert M. Webb	Unpaid
National Army Museum	Deputy Chairman of NAM Council	Sir John Waters	Unpaid
Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors	Chairman	His Honour Judge Rogers	Paid per meeting
Review Board for Government Contracts	CBI Nominated Member	John Arbuthnot	Paid
Defence Scientific Advisory Council	Chairman of one of DSAC's Boards	Professor Peter Blain	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. Kenneth Blair	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. Simon Cambridge	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor John Carruthers	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor James Castle	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. C. Coleman	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Brian Collins	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Richard Dolby	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Robin East	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Peter Fentem	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor James Fleck	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor George French	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Brian Gladman	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. David Graham	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Hugh Griffiths	Paid per meeting
	Deputy Chairman of one of DSAC's Boards	Professor Kenneth Hambleton	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor David Harper	Paid per meeting
	Chairman of one of DSAC's Boards	Professor Christopher Harris	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor John Hetherington	Paid per meeting
	Deputy Chairman of one of DSAC's Boards	Professor Cyril Hilsum	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Derek Hitchins	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. J. Hollington	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Charles Howarth	Paid per meeting

Public body	*Position*	*Name*	*Remuneration*
	Independent registered member	Mr. Brian Hughes	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. J. Hultgren	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Reginald Humphryes	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor John Inkson	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Nicholas	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Jennings B.Sc. Ph.D.	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Dylan Jones	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. David Joynson	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Andrew Keane	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr Andrew Kearsley	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Laurence King	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Anthony Kinloch	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. J. Knezevic	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. B. Laverty	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Ian Levack	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Nigel Lightfoot M.Sc. M.B B.S FRCPath	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Roderick Logan	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. Derek Long	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. John McCulloch	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. Ian McFarlane	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. R. Mulligan	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. T. de V. Naylor	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. Christopher Neale	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Roger Needham Feng F.Rs	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. P. Oakley	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor William Price	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Brian Richards	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Geoffrey Robinson Feng	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Robert Shannon	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. Michaed Sharland	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Professor Michael Sleep	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. P. Tittler	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Ms Jane Tozer	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Mr. William Uttley-Moore	Paid per meeting
	Chairman of one of DSAC's Boards	Professor Roger Voles	Paid per meeting
	Independent registered member	Dr. Simon Watts M.A, M.Sc., Ph.D., Ceng, F.I.E.E	Paid per meeting

Plastic Baton Rounds

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts have been made *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* in conjunction with other departments to identify how many faulty plastic baton rounds were exported; and whether these plastic baton rounds have been recalled or the appropriate authorities notified. [20049]

Mr. Spellar: No plastic baton rounds, of the type withdrawn from operational use by the Army this year, have been exported; this has been confirmed by the manufacturer.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when each of the three aircraft carriers are expected to reach the end of their service lives. [20076]

Dr. Reid: HM Ships Invincible, Illustrious and Ark Royal were commissioned in July 1980, June 1982 and November 1985 respectively. The life expectancy of the Invincible Class aircraft carriers is expected to be in the order of 30 years, although this will be kept under review.

RAF Watton

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of maintaining the premises at the former RAF Watton in the last year for which figures are available. [20819]

Mr. Spellar: The cost of maintaining RAF Watton pending disposal during the last 12 months was approximately £110,000. This provided for ensuring that the buildings are maintained in a weathertight and vandal-proof condition, basic maintenance such as grass cutting, meeting Health and Safety requirements and employing a 24 hour Security Guard Service.

Gulf War

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *71,* if he will now publish the results of his inquiries into dead animals found and analysed during the Gulf War; and if he will make a statement. [20900]

Dr. Reid: My Department is still awaiting information in respect of one important aspect of this matter from outside MOD. If we are not able to obtain that further information shortly, I will publish what we have found so far, although this may leave this aspect unresolved.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full-time employees in his Department are paid at an hourly rate of *(a)* £3.59, *(b)* between £3.60 and £3.75 and *(c)* between £3.76 and £4. [20609]

Dr. Howells: The number of full-time employees in the Department for Education and Employment paid at an hourly rate of:

(a) £3.59 is 25;

(b) between £3.60 and £3.75 is 1;

(c) between £3.76 and £4.00 is 5.

Self-financing Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of currency turbulence in south-east Asia on the numbers of assisted and self-financed students coming to Britain from those countries. [20321]

Dr. Howells: The effects of currency turbulence in south-east Asia will vary in different countries and for different individuals. This is a complex and unpredictable issue and it is unlikely that an overall assessment of any effect on numbers can be made in the short to medium term.

Disability Rights Task Force

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will appoint a person with a learning disability to the Disability Rights Task Force. [20560]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The question of whether a person with learning disabilities should be appointed to the Disability Rights Task Force has already been raised with me. I have invited the Chair and Chief Executive of Mencap to discuss this with me.

Superhighways Initiative

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the Education Department's superhighways initiative evaluation is now complete; and when the synoptic report of that evaluation will be published. [21331]

Dr. Howells: Project evaluation was completed over the summer. The report is to be released today and we have placed a copy in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Youth Justice System

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses he has received to each of the three consultation papers on reform of the youth justice system; and if he will publish a summary of those responses. [21311]

Mr. Straw: By 8 December 1997, a total of 297 responses had been received to the consultation paper "Tackling Youth Crime" (published 25 September); 250 responses to the consultation paper "New National and Local Focus on Youth Crime" (published 9 October); and 177 responses to the consultation paper "Tackling Delays in the Youth Justice System" (published 15 October). Summaries of the responses to each of the three papers have been placed in the Library.

Intelligence Service and Crime Squad

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what key objectives and performance indicators he proposes to set for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad for 1998–99. [21309]

Mr. Straw: We intend that the provisions of the Police Act 1997 relating to the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and the National Crime Squad should be fully implemented on 1 April 1998. I have determined, following the consultation process required under the Police Act 1997, that the key objectives and performance indicators for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and National Crime Squad for 1998–99 will be:

National Criminal Intelligence Service Objectives:

1. To improve the quality of criminal intelligence available from overseas about criminals engaged in serious and organised transnational crime which impacts on the United Kingdom.

Performance indicator: Five per cent. increase in the number of intelligence reports disseminated which include material obtained from overseas and which fall within the highest two levels of the NCIS quality matrix.

2. To improve the quality of criminal intelligence available to combat serious and organised crime within the United Kingdom.

Performance indicator: Five per cent. increase in the number of intelligence reports disseminated which fall within the highest two levels of the NCIS quality matrix.

National Crime Squad Objectives:

1. To secure, in co-operation with the Scottish Crime Squad and other law enforcement agencies as necessary, consistent improvement in the quality of operations leading to the arrest and prosecution of individuals or the disruption of criminal enterprises engaged in serious and organised transnational crime which impacts on the United Kingdom.

Performance indicator: Five per cent. increase in individuals charged and criminal enterprises disrupted who were engaged in serious and organised crime which impacts on the United Kingdom.

2. To secure, in co-operation with the Scottish Crime Squad and other law enforcement agencies as necessary, consistent improvement in the quality of operations leading to the arrest and prosecution of individuals or disruption of criminal enterprises engaged in serious and organised crime within the United Kingdom.

Performance indicator: Five per cent. increase in individuals charged and criminal enterprises disrupted who were engaged in serious and organised crime within the United Kingdom.

Racial Violence

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to "Racial Violence and Harassment: A Consultation Document" were received; and if he will make a statement. [21310]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: One hundred and eighteen responses were received. A list of respondents and a summary of the main points raised can be found in the Library, in a document entitled: "Responses to the Home Office Consultation Document on Racial Violence and Harassment".

Remand

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to the consultation document, "Reducing Remand Delays", were received during the consultation period; and if he will publish a summary of those responses. [21330]

Mr. Straw: Twenty one responses were received. A summary of the main points has been placed in the Library.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the training of police baton gunners in testing weapons, with particular reference to faulty bullets and plastic batons. [20028]

Mr. Michael: Training baton round gunners is the responsibility of individual chief police officers. I would expect forces to train only using equipment which is suitable for the purpose. Baton round gunners do not use bullets. They may sometimes test equipment to check that it is satisfactory or to help in the development of new equipment.

Exports Initiative

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role the Association of Chief Police Officers played in the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* management of the Home Office Export Initiative. [20022]

Mr. Michael: The then President of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) was asked in October 1995 if the Association wished to nominate a representative of the police service to help establish and manage the Home Office Exports Initiative. ACPO was duly represented on the ISG by a member of the Surrey Police.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which trade associations were involved in the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* management of the Home Office Exports Initiative. [20040]

Mr. Michael: Three trade associations were represented on the Home Office Exports Initiative Steering Group: the Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers (APPSS); the British Security Industry Association (BSIA); and the Police Information Technology and Communications Suppliers Association (PITACSA). All three were instrumental in establishing the Initiative, having met senior officials in the Home Office in September 1995 to determine its future strategy.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons he decided to end the Home Office Exports Initiative. [20041]

Mr. Michael: The decision to end the Home Office Exports Initiative was taken in the context of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. My right hon. Friend considered that the Initiative did not sit happily with the core functions of the Department, particularly when viewed against the substantial support for exporting given by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if goods and services supplied under the Home Office Exports Initiative were subject to normal Export Control procedures. [20021]

Mr. Michael: Yes. Where the supply of the goods or services concerned were subject to control, a licence would have been required.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the United Kingdom police forces which participated in the Home Office Exports Initiative. [20031]

Mr. Michael: Police forces in England and Wales were represented on the Home Office Exports Initiative Steering Group by Surrey Police. In addition, officers from the Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Metropolitan Police, Surrey Police and Wiltshire Constabulary participated in overseas trade exhibitions sponsored by the Initiative.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which *(a)* police, *(b)* security and *(c)* paramilitary forces of foreign governments, were supplied with goods and services under the Home Office Exports Initiative; and what consideration was given to the human rights record of governments concerned. [20030]

Mr. Michael: Information abut the goods and services exported by companies assisted by the Home Office Exports Initiative is not available. I am informed that where a licence was required for the supply of goods or services under the Initiative, it would have been issued only if that was consistent with the Government's policy at the time.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis companies were chosen to participate in the Home Office Exports Initiative; and if he will publish the criteria which were used to evaluate the suitability of companies to participate in the Initiative. [20020]

Mr. Michael: I am informed that the services of the Home Office Export Promoter and activities sponsored by the Initiative were open to all companies in the policing and security sector.

Public Order Act

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions have been recorded under *(a)* section 4a and *(b)* section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 in the last year for which figures are available; [20300]

Mr. Michael: In 1996, the number of convictions under sections 4a and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 were 295 and 14,944 respectively.

Community Service and Combination Orders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many community service orders were imposed in respect of offenders *(a)* aged 15 to 17 years and *(b)* aged 17 to 21 years old in the last year for which figures are available. [20291]

(2) how many combination orders were imposed in respect of offenders *(a)* aged 15 to 17 years and *(b)* aged 17 to 21 years in the last year for which figures are available. [20292]

Mr. Michael: Community Service Orders and Combination Orders are available only for offenders aged 16 or over.

Information for 1996 is given in the table.

Number of persons sentenced to Community Service Orders and Combination Orders by age-group, 1996

England and Wales

	Age-group	
	16–17	*18–21*
Community Service Order	3,719	1,312
Combination Order	11,569	4,796

Compensation Orders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many compensation orders have been made in respect of *(a)* under 17-year-old, *(b)* 17 to 21 year old and *(c)* over 21-year-old offenders in the last year for which figures are available; [20297]

(2) what assessment he has made of the use of compensation orders by the courts. [20298]

Mr. Michael: Ninety-four thousand eight hundred offenders were ordered to pay compensation orders in 1996, two per cent. more than in 1995 but fewer than the 1991 total of 112,800.

In 1996, of the 94,800 offenders ordered to pay compensation orders, 17,400 were aged 10 to 17, 17,900 were aged 18 to 20 and 59,500 were aged 21 and over.

Crime Concern

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the youth action groups promoted by Crime Concern. [20294]

Mr. Michael: This Government consider the Youth Action Initiative to be an excellent model of how to involve young people in dealing with issues of disorder and anti-social behaviour which this Government are determined to tackle. We strongly support the wider expansion of the initiatives.

Youth Action Group is encouraged to tackle problems of relevance to young people, such as graffiti, vandalism, bullying in schools, personal safety and substance abuse. The best of such Groups have an impact, not only on their schools, but on the wider community. Youth Action Groups provide young people with an opportunity to be part of the solution to crime and not just part of the problem. The remarkable achievements demonstrated by winners of the Prudential Youth Action Awards in recent years demonstrate the potential of young people when given that opportunity. I am very keen to ensure that the work of the Youth Action Groups is linked closely to that of the new statutory partnerships for preventing crime and disorder which will be established once the Crime and Disorder Bill takes effect. I am currently looking at ways in which this objective can be achieved.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the number of experiments on animals. [20137]

Mr. George Howarth: We announced on 6 November that we had secured an end to the testing of finished cosmetic products; that we will be exploring a ban on the use of animals for testing ingredients intended for "vanity" products; and that we will be phasing out the use of ascitic animals in monoclonal antibody production.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 requires that the suffering of animals and the number of animals used in individual programmes of work be minimised. It does not provide a mechanism for guaranteeing a year-on-year reduction in the number of animals used. Reductions are best achieved by the development, validation and implementation of alternatives.

To this end, we are exploring ways to promote the development and greater use of alternatives. We are seeking advice from the Animal Procedures Committee, the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) and others about the establishment of a database on alternative methods. We have also increased the budget, which we make available to the Animal Procedures Committee to sponsor research on alternatives, from £182,000 in 1997–98 to £259,000 in 1998–99.

We are encouraging regulators both in the United Kingdom and through Europe to review the need to use animals in regulatory safety testing.

Rural Crime

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he proposes to reduce crime in villages and small towns. [20136]

Mr. Michael: The Government recognise that rural communities have very different needs to urban communities. Whilst they suffer from most of the same types of crime as urban areas, there are also those crimes which are particular to the countryside, such as theft of livestock and farm equipment.

Due to the geographical nature of the countryside, police responses to incidents of crime cannot always be as quick as they and the public would like. Because of this, there is an onus on people to take precautions against becoming victims of crime. There are now many excellent partnership schemes which have developed between the police and the local communities and the creation of many, and diverse, "Watch" schemes is testimony to their success.

The provision for new statutory duties for local authorities and the police jointly to analyse and identify local problems of crime and disorder in the Crime and Disorder Bill will enhance those schemes already in existence. With input from local communities, a strategy will be drawn up and implemented to tackle those problems. This will provide an opportunity to take stock of the crime problems of both rural and urban areas.

Ministerial Group on the Family

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the Ministerial Group on the family will meet. [20318]

Mr. Michael: The group has met four times to date. It will meet again as necessary to take forward its work, which consists of looking at a wide range of issues concerned with family policy as part of the Government's manifesto commitment to strengthening family life.

Burglary and Theft

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded theft and burglary offences there were in England and Wales in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997 to date; and if he will make a statement. [20316]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is given in the table.

Offences of theft and burglary recorded by the police
England and Wales

Year	*Theft*	*Burglary*
1994	2,564,608	1,256,682
1995	2,452,109	1,239,484
1996	2,383,946	1,164,583
January–June 1997	1,107,949	537,189

Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what outside authority visits the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre to observe the conditions in that establishment; when the last visit took place; what reports and recommendations were sent to the appropriate Home Office department; and if he will make a statement. [20622]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: While there is no statutory provision for the inspection of immigration detention centres by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Tumim inspected Harmondsworth Detention Centre in November 1988 at the invitation of the then Home Secretary. Judge Tumim's subsequent report was published in March 1989 and made a number of recommendations which, with only one exception, have all been implemented. The provision of a multi-gym has not been possible because of a lack of suitable accommodation.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, has inspected both Campsfield House and Tinsley House Detention Centres in the past year, and intends to conduct a full inspection of Harmondsworth Detention Centre in his 1998–99 programme.

An independent body, the Harmondsworth Visiting Committee, also provides reports for the Home Secretary on the detention centre. Established in 1990, the Harmondsworth Visiting Committee's members are appointed by the Home Secretary and are drawn from a variety of different ethnic, cultural and occupational backgrounds. The Committee's function is to satisfy itself about the administration of the centre, the upkeep of the premises, and the centre's facilities for the care and treatment of detainees. The last such visit made by the Committee was on 10 December 1997. Matters arising from these visits are discussed the same day with members of Group 4 Total Security Limited and the Detention Management Unit of the Immigration Service.

Visiting Committee members have access to the Detention Centre and detainees at all times and can raise any matters of concern, either with the Immigration Service or direct with the Home Secretary. The Committee meets formally once a month and submits an annual report to the Home Secretary on the state of the Centre and its administration. This report may include the provision of any advice or suggestions considered appropriate.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily schedule of activities that people held at the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre are allowed to follow each day; and if he will list the activities. [20620]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A full time amenities officer is employed at Harmondsworth Detention Centre and she prepares and publishes a schedule of activities available in the centre. Detainees may attend or participate in as many of the activities as they wish. Organised activities to date have included:

Art Classes
Badminton
Battleships
Bingo
Boules
Card Games
Chess
Chess Competitions
Craft Afternoons
Cricket
Dice Games
Dominoes
Draughts
Football
Football Competitions
Games Evenings
Jenga
Logic Games
Mindtrap
Music Evenings
Needlecraft
Scrabble Competition
Table tennis
Table Tennis Competitions
Table football
Table Football Competitions
Treasure Hunt
Video Game Competitions
Volleyball
Volleyball Competitions.

Detainees are also encouraged to organise their own activities and, in addition to the amenities listed, have access to jigsaw puzzles, playing cards and board games. They also have access to television sets, with both terrestrial and satellite channels, and a video recording machine is available for detainees to watch their own approved foreign language material. A selection of newspapers and books in various languages is provided.

English lessons are given at the Centre twice a week. A room has been set aside for multi-denominational private prayer, and larger prayer meetings are held regularly and attended by visiting clergy.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the present clothes washing facilities that exist at the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre; and when these facilities were last inspected. [20621]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A washing machine and tumble dryer are provided in each of the two buildings at Harmondsworth Detention Centre for the use of detainees. Hand washing facilities are also available. Washing powder is provided free of charge.

The machines are tested annually for electrical safety and were last inspected in April 1997. Should any fault be reported on any of the machines, an engineer is called to carry out the necessary repairs.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisation is responsible for the running of the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre; and to whom it reports within his Department. [20592]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Group Four Total Security Limited are employed under contract by the Home Office to undertake the day-to-day supervision and care of immigration detainees held at the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre. Overall management of the centre is undertaken on site by staff of the Detention Management Unit, which is part of the Immigration Service Enforcement Directorate.

Firearms

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Lambeth firearms amnesty conducted by the Metropolitan Police. [20618]

Mr. Michael: The local amnesty held in Lambeth during the month of November was a great success with 24 firearms in total being surrendered. This consisted of 16 handguns, four shot guns, two rifles and two air weapons. In addition, four imitation firearms and a canister of pepper spray were also surrendered. A large amount of ammunition was also handed in. The streets of South London are a little safer as a result of this initiative.

This was the first local, as opposed to national, amnesty to have been held and had the strong support of the local community and the Metropolitan Police. The number of items handed in during the local amnesty compares with only two guns handed in in Lambeth during the last national amnesty. We will continue to endorse similar initiatives in the future which have the same level of community and police support.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time taken between receipt of an application for British citizenship and a decision being made. [20481]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* We do not record the time taken between receipt of an application and a decision being made, but do record the time taken from receipt to a certificate being issued. As at 30 November 1997, the average length of time was 14.9 months.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19975]

Mr. Straw: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information as soon as possible. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20526]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Home Office is currently in the process of assessing whether its suppliers are millennium compliant. The Home Office's policy is to ensure that contractual obligations are met by the contracted supplier. If they were unable to do so due to their millennium non-compliance, we would assess whether to terminate their contract.

Contracts with suppliers will be judged on their own merits taking into consideration the nature and scope of the contract, and the effect non-compliance has on delivery of the goods or services required by the Department (especially when they are of a strategic nature).

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19317]

Mr. Sraw: My Department employs two special advisers and one expert special adviser working part-time on the Task Force on youth justice. We have not employed any review body members. In order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned, details of salaries cannot be provided. Information on the total paybill for special advisers was, however, provided in the answers which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 472–73.

Policing (Party Conference)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much special grant will be paid to the Dorset Police Authority towards the cost of the policing of the Conservative Party Conference in Bournemouth in October 1998. [20566]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend has authorised an additional payment of police grant to Dorset Police Authority of up to £750,000 in 1998–99 as a contribution to the costs of safeguarding national security at the

Conservative Party conference. A similar sum is being made available to Lancashire Police Authority in respect of next year's Labour Party Conference in Blackpool.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts to smuggle class A or B drugs into prisons were discovered in the most recent year for which figures are available; how many criminal prosecutions followed; and what penalties were imposed. [20963]

Mr. George Howarth: Information is not collected centrally in this detail. But in the 12 months ending 30 November 1997, a total of 1,211 people visiting prisons were arrested by the police in connection with possible drug-related offences. The Prison Service does not record what action was subsequently taken by the police.

Prisons (Young People)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of the detention of youths aged 15 to 17 years within adult prisons. [20679]

Ms Quin: The Government's policy is to accommodate offenders under 18 sentenced to Detention in young offender institutions. Exceptionally, they may be accommodated in prison on an individual and temporary basis. Most unsentenced young offenders aged under 18 are held in specialised remand facilities alongside young offender institutions but some are accommodated separately from adults in adult prisons. The Prison Service is currently considering the setting up of establishments for male juveniles only.

The Government are reviewing the juvenile secure estate as part of the comprehensive spending review.

Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he expects to reply to the letters of 31 July, 18 September and 12 November from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam concerning Cherny Ntamntambo. [20707]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have written to the hon. Member today.

Stephen Lawrence

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report by the Police Complaints Authority on their investigation of the complaints against the Metropolitan Police concerning the murder of Stephen Lawrence. [21031]

Mr. Straw: I am today laying before Parliament the report submitted to me by the Police Complaints Authority. This has been made under section 97(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which allows the Authority to make a report to the Secretary of State on any matters coming to its notice to which it considers that his attention should be drawn by reason of their gravity or other exceptional circumstances.

The report sets out the main findings resulting from an investigation carried out by officers from Kent Constabulary, under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority, into the way in which the Metropolitan Police Service handled the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

The report concludes that the Metropolitan Police Service has committed substantial resources over several years to the investigation of this appalling crime, and that there is no doubt that a considerable amount of hard work has been undertaken. The report also concludes that the police operation undertaken immediately after the assault was well organised and effective and that there was no evidence of racist conduct by police officers. The report concludes, however, that there were significant weaknesses, omissions and lost opportunities during the murder investigation. Those errors were not identified by the internal review carried out by the Metropolitan Police. As a result, subsequent attempts to solve the crime have been hampered.

The Metropolitan Police Commissioner has told me that he broadly accepts the findings of this initial report and now awaits the full report from the Kent investigation. He has told me that the Metropolitan Police have moved forward significantly in the investigation of major crime since 1993 but will address all of the shortcomings identified in the supervision and management of this investigation. They will also consider carefully the lessons to be learned.

This report and its conclusion will now be considered by the Inquiry which I have established under the Chairmanship of Sir William Macpherson of Cluny to inquire into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence in order particularly to identify the lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes. The inquiry intends to begin public hearings in February.

The Police Complaints Authority Report also identifies several issues which are relevant to the handling of serious crimes by the police generally. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Crime Committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers are examining national standards in the investigation of major crime with a view to producing a model for the handling of major inquiries. During 1998, the Inspectorate will also be conducting a thematic inspection of major crime investigation across the Police Service.

The Police Complaints Authority Report also draws attention to the shortcomings in first aid skills possessed by the officers who were first to arrive at the scene of the murder. All chief constables have already been recommended to deal with this issue within their forces, by a report of a thematic inspection on officer safety by Her Majesty's Inspectorate which was published in October.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Millennium Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what representations he has received

in respect of regional and cultural imbalances in the projects given funding by the Millennium Commission to date; [19169]

(2) if he will make a sttaement on the progress of Millennium Commission bids from the east midlands; [19167]

(3) what steps he proposes to take to ensure equity between regions in the projects given funding by the Millennium Commission; [19168]

(4) What steps have been taken by the Millennium Commission to work with the Asian community on the ethnic minority bids which have been submitted; [20951]

(5) if he will review the decision to exclude the Akshardham project from further examination for millennium funding; [20956]

(6) which millennium commissioners were present at a meeting on Wednesday 10 December; and what time was allocated to discuss ethnic minority projects; [20953]

(7) in what ways the Millennium Commission publicised the change of criteria to encourage more ethnic minority applications for funding; [20954]

(8) if he will list the individuals and organisations supporting bids by the *(a)* Belgrave Baheno, *(b)* Akshardham and *(c)* the Asha projects for millennium funding; [20948]

(9) when the proposals for the Asha project were *(a)* received and *(b)* evaluated by the Millennium Commission; [20960]

(10) how many projects considered for funding millennium commissioners have visited to date; [20956]

(11) if groups on the Millennium Commission reserve list will be able to proceed to detailed assessment if they so wish; [20955]

(12) in how many languages the Millennium Commission issued their application forms for funding; [20886]

(13) how many meetings officials of the Millennium Commission have had with representatives of the projects considered by the Millennium Commission on 10 December; with which projects they were associated; and on what dates; [20961]

(14) what discussions took place between the Millennium Commission and ethnic minority groups prior to the change of criteria to encourage more ethnic minority groups to put forward applications; [20884]

(15) if he will publish the number of people of Asian origin who are employed at the Millennium Commission and the grade at which they are employed; [20950]

(16) if the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission's project Akshardham can proceed to detailed appraisal; [20885]

(17) how much funding was allocated to ethnic minority projects by the Millennium Commission at its meeting on 10 December. [20949]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19974]

Mr. Chris Smith: The information requested is listed in the table. All of these appointments have been confirmed but some are to take effect from a future date:

Sponsored body	*Role*	*Name*	*Remuneration*
Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection	Member	Ms Mary Beaumont	No
Advisory Council on Libraries	Member	Mrs. Grace Kempster	No
Architectural Heritage Fund	Council Member	Mr. William Cadell	No
Architectural Heritage Fund	Council Member	Ms Jane Sharman	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. Rod Natkiel	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. Christopher Price	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. David Brierley	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. Trevor Phillips	No
British Film Institute	Chairman	Mr. Alan Parker	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mrs. Joan Bakewell	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Alan Howden	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Tony Elliott	No
National Film and Television School	Governor	Mr. John McVay	No
National Film and Television School	Governor	Mr. Tim Bevan	No
National Lottery Charities Board	Chairman	The Hon. David Sieff	Yes
National Lottery Charities Board	Member	Sir Adam Ridley	Yes
National Lottery Charities Board	Member	Mrs. Stella Clarke	Yes
National Lottery Charities Board	Member	Mrs. Amanda Jordan	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Chairman	Mr. David McDonnell	No

Sponsored body	Role	Name	Remuneration
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Professor Preston King	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Mrs. Vorrey Branthwaite	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Mr. Barrie Marsh	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Ms Janet Kear	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Councillor Frank Prendergast	No
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Chairman	Mr. Michael Holroyd	No
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Member	Ms Hilary Mantel	No
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Member	Mrs. Claire Tomalin	No
Radio Authority Deputy	Chairman	Mr. Michael Moriarty	Yes
Reviewing Committee on the Exports of Works of Art	Member	Mr. Ian Gow	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Ms Joan Bakewell	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Ms Sue McGregor	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Sir Ian McKellen	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Mr. James Oliver	No
S4C	Chairman	Mr. Ifan Prys-Edwards	Yes
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. David Jordan	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Lord Stewartby	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Professor Norman Palmer	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. Patrick Finn	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. Jack Ogden	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. John Casey	No

Terrestrial Television

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he will announce the outcome of his review into the listing of sports events for broadcast on domestic terrestrial television. [20380]

Mr. Chris Smith: I expect the advisory group to make its recommendations to me on the content of the list before Easter 1998, and I hope to announce the outcome of the review shortly thereafter.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received in respect of the listing and de-listing of sports events for terrestrial television. [20378]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have received 776 representations on this subject since the review of the content of the list was announced in May, including 28 representations from hon. Members. The majority of these representations concerned the television coverage of particular sports events.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he last met Lord MacLaurin to discuss the listing of cricket for broadcast on terrestrial television. [20379]

Mr. Chris Smith: When I met Lord MacLaurin on 18 August, he raised the question of the inclusion of Test cricket among the events listed under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. I shall be meeting him again on 18 December. The England and Wales Cricket Board has also been consulted as part of my review, and its response will be made available to the advisory group assisting me in that review.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of the listing of sports events for terrestrial television. [20381]

Mr. Chris Smith: I announced the criteria to be used to guide the review on 25 November. An advisory group is considering the events currently listed, and the additional major sports events announced on that day, against these criteria. As part of the review, I have consulted the rights holders for all the events under consideration; broadcast regulators and other interested parties on the content of the list, and their responses will be made available to the advisory group.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19368]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The Department has a total of 13 car park spaces; four for Ministerial use and one for use by the Permanent Secretary. The remaining eight spaces are set aside for staff and visitors with medical problems or welfare requirements and contractors working on the premises. All the Department's car park spaces are located in London.

British Library

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list *(a)* the cost to date and *(b)* estimated completion cost of the new British Library building at St. Pancras. [19056]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The total construction project budget for the British Library St. Pancras building is £511.1 million. The expenditure committed to date stands at approximately £505.7 million. However, negotiations continue with some contractors on their final accounts and it is not possible, therefore, to estimate the final outturn for the project until all these accounts have been settled.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19308]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department employs one full-time and one part-time Special Adviser. Prior to 1 May the Department of National Heritage employed one full-time Special Adviser. In order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned it would be inappropriate to reveal their salary details. However the total paybill for Special Advisers was given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in response to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

From time to time my Department sets up task forces, review groups or other informal mechanisms. Normal practice is that non-civil servants on these groups are not employed on a salary basis although occasionally travel expenses may by paid the costs of which are not held centrally. A similar arrangement applied prior to 1 May.

National Sports Council

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals *(a)* he and *(b)* the Sports Council have evaluated for the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre; and at what costs. [19763]

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not evaluated any investment proposals regarding Crystal Palace National Sports Centre.

The English Sports Council is currently in discussions with the London Borough of Bromley, who own the site, representatives of sports organisations and others regarding future sporting provision at Crystal Palace National Sports Centre. A number of proposals are being considered. Any decisions will need to take account of the Centre's Grade II* listing, which I announced last week.

My right hon. Friend and I are kept informed of developments on a regular basis.

Information regarding costs of these considerations is not available.

Sport and Schools

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to co-operate with Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in respect of his Department's duties in relation to sport in schools; and if he will list the action taken in response to HMCI's findings on sport in schools. [19485]

Mr. Banks: My Department has no official duties in relation to sport in schools but we take a keen interest in this area. We have regular contact with the Department for Education and Employment to discuss matters of mutual concern and HMCI's findings form a valuable basis for our discussions.

Athletics Facilities (Wembley)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals have been put to him for athletics facilities at the planned new Wembley Stadium; and at what costs. [19762]

Mr. Banks: These are matters for the English Sports Council. I understand the athletics facilities at the new English National Stadium will meet the criteria of the International Amateur Athletics Federation for a world class facility capable of staging major world athletic events. The English Sports Council has agreed a provisional Lottery award of £120 million to the English National Stadium Trust, towards total estimated project costs of £240 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Gasification

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the feasibility of underground coal gasification as a source of energy. [20666]

Mr. Battle: My Department is participating in a European field trial of underground coal gasification (UCG) as part of our coal R and D programme. This is a joint project involving Spain, Belgium and the UK with substantial financial support from the European Commission's THERMIE Demonstration programme. The total cost of the project which started in 1991 is £14 million and the UK contribution is £1.7 million. The project is due to end next year once the current gasification trials have been completed. Results to date have shown the feasibility of gasifying Western European coals at depths in excess of 500 metres. The gas produced from the present trials had a calorific value of approaching a third that of natural gas. This is better than the gas produced by some clean coal gasification power generation processes and indicates UGC technology may offer a potential energy source for power generation in the future.

The economics of UGC will be evaluated in more detail on completion of the current gasification trials. Underground coal gasification may be an attractive primary energy source in the longer term. It is currently many times more expensive than current gas prices, and likely to remain so for many years even when the technical problems have been overcome. The technology could be used to access coal reserves too deep for

conventional mining (both opencast and deep mine). In the longer term it could be used to access the vast reserves of high volatile coal located beneath the North Sea. At least 10 years of R and D work is likely to be needed before underground coal gasification can even be considered to be a commercial option.

Enemy Property

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which other Governments her Department is consulting in preparation of the report on British policy on enemy property during and after the Second World War. [19579]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: While I and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary have not consulted with any other Governments in the preparation of this report, we shall wish to give this further consideration.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the proposed extension of the Working Time Directive to include the fishing industry and other currently exempt professions. [20651]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The European Commission have issued a White Paper but have not yet made detailed proposals. Each of the sectors excluded from the scope of the Working Time Directive has its own specific characteristics and we will need to look carefully at how subsequent proposals take these into account. Any proposals for legislation must respect our particular concerns, for example, about junior doctors, the offshore oil and gas industry and sea fishing.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Land Mines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid has been given to Egypt in each year since 1967 to assist in the clearance of land mines laid in World War II. [20634]

Clare Short: Mine detection equipment to the value of £500,000 was provided from the overseas aid budget in 1996. A further £100,000 for such equipment has been committed in Financial year 1997–98.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence has, from the early 1980s, provided the Egyptian authorities with copies of all surviving maps of known minefields and supporting information on the types of mines laid and the techniques used by the Commonwealth forces during the war. There have been three visits to Egypt by Royal Engineer Ordnance Disposal officers (in 1981, 1984 and 1994); reconnaissance flights over the area were also conducted by the RAF in 1984. The Ministry of Defence is currently preparing a new version of the map and data package which makes use of advances in technology where possible.

South Africa (Investment)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the budget for the British Investment in South Africa (LETS) Scheme in *(a)* 1985–86, *(b)* 1986–87 and *(c)* 1987–88. [20478]

Clare Short: The total budget for the British Investment in Africa Promotion Scheme to cover both Pre-Investment Feasibility Studies (PIFS) and LETS components is £2 million. Expenditure for the three years was as follows:

1995–96: £203,505

1996–97: £356,276

1997–98: £275,191 (April–December)

All expenditure has been on the (PIFS) facility.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to simplify the criteria for small firms who make applications to the British Investment in South Africa (LETS) Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [20476]

Clare Short: The British Investment in South Africa Promotion Scheme was reviewed earlier this year and a number of improvements have recently been made to enhance its effectiveness. The Local Employee Training Scheme (LETS) has been made more accessible to smaller firms by reducing the minimum intended investment from £200,000 to £100,000. Firms employing between 10 and 500 employees are eligible to apply for LETS grants to cover 50 per cent. of training costs up to a maximum of £50,000. UK firms which have already received a Pre-Investment Feasibility Study (PIFS) grant and have subsequently invested in South Africa are also now eligible to apply for a LETS grant. A brochure giving details of the improvements made to the Scheme has been issued recently by the British Council, the Scheme managers.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many grants have been awarded to British businesses for the British Investment in South Africa (LETS) Scheme since its inception. [20477]

Clare Short: The British Investment in South Africa Promotion Scheme, known as BIS, has two components. Twenty-five grants have been awarded for Pre-Investment Feasibility Studies. Only four applications have been received for the Local Employees Training Scheme (LETS). One was rejected, one lapsed and the other two are currently under consideration.

AIDS

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she *(a)* is taking *(b)* proposes to take to control the spread of AIDS in Africa; and what funding her Department provides for such measures; [20382]

Clare Short: The Department is contributing to the international effort through annual grants to UNAIDS which is responsible for co-ordinating the UN response to

HIV/AIDS. DFID also works through its bilateral partnerships in many African countries and is funding research which is contributing to the development of new methods of protection against infection such as mircrobicides. For future work, we attach particular importance to making renewed efforts to meet the needs of adolescents.

Bilateral expenditure on HIV/AIDS related activities (including prevention, treatment and care) in Africa in calendar year 1996 was £9.2 million. In addition, DFID's contribution to UNAIDS was £3.5 million. It is not possible to disaggregate the proportion of this spent in Africa. Elements of DFID contributions to the UK Medical Research Council and to multilateral agencies (EU, World Bank, United Nations Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation) will also be expended on HIV/AIDS related activities in Africa but similarly cannot be disaggregated.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date her Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20520]

Mr. Foulkes: When relevant, the Department will remind non-governmental organisations and suppliers it deals with that they must have systems in place which enable them fully to meet the terms of those agreements and contracts which continue into the new millennium.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Civil Servants (Integration)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in integrating civil servants from the formerly separate departments of Transport and the Environment; and if he will make a statement on the policy of integrating formerly separated departmental specialists. [19668]

Mr. Prescott: Good progress has been made.

Single integrated teams covering Personnel, Finance, Communications and Private Office support have been established. Action is being taken to establish single integrated Personnel, Finance and IT systems. The Land-use Planning Directorate has been brought together with the Roads and Local Transport Group, to build on the many linkages between these policy areas. Policies have been put in place to encourage staff to move to areas of work formerly covered by the other Department and two staff at Director General level, one from each former Department, have already exchanged posts.

Single Heads of Profession have been identified and specialists working in central groups, such as lawyers and scientists, have been integrated.

To encourage integrating further and give strategic focus to the new Department, I have agreed the following new aim and objectives:

The aim of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is to improve the quality of life by promoting sustainable development at home and abroad, fostering economic prosperity and supporting local democracy.

Its main objectives are:

1. To protect and improve the environment, and to integrate the environment with other policies across government and international fora.
2. To offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home and so promote social cohesion, well-being and self-dependence.
3. To promote efficient and integrated transport services across different modes and reduce road traffic growth, in order better to meet the mobility needs of the travelling public and industry.
4. To deliver regulatory and other transport services to the public and industry and to collect taxes efficiently and fairly.
5. To enhance opportunity in rural areas, improve enjoyment of the countryside and conserve and manage wildlife resources.
6. To create a fair and efficient land use planning system that respects regional differences and promotes development which is of high quality and sustainable.
7. To promote a system of elected government in England which responds to the needs of local communities.
8. To enhance economic development and social cohesion throughout England through effective regional action and integrated local regeneration programmes.
9. To secure an efficient market in the construction industry, with innovative and successful UK firms that meet the needs of clients and society and are competitive at home and abroad.
10. To improve health and safety by reducing risks from work activity, travel and the environment.

These objectives may be subject to further review in the light of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Eco-labelling

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when Her Majesty's Government introduced the European Union eco-labelling scheme; how it is financed; and what is the total cost of the scheme to date; [19740]

(2) how many *(a)* product categories and *(b)* products have been awarded the Eco-label since March 1992; [19908]

(3) if he will make a statement on the publicity given in promoting the Eco-labelling Scheme detailing *(a)* the form in which publicity has been provided and *(b)* its cost; [19910]

(4) how many people are employed by the Eco-labelling Board. [19907]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board was established in November 1992 to administer the European Union eco-labelling scheme within the United Kingdom. It is financed partly by grant-in-aid from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Department of Trade and Industry, and partly by income from application and licence fees. The Board has received a total of £3.5 million in grant-in-aid to date.

Since the launch of the scheme, a total of 12 products in four categories (washing machines, toilet paper, kitchen towels and household paints and varnishes) have been awarded the ecolabel within the United Kingdom.

The Board promotes the scheme through leaflets, newsletters, exhibitions, conferences and press advertising, and has spent a total of £500,000 on promotion to date. The scheme also featured in a number of broader-based advertising campaigns run by the then Department of the Environment in 1996 and early 1997.

The United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board comprises a Chairman and 14 members, all of whom serve part time. They are supported by an executive of seven full-time officers and one part-time officer.

Motor Cycles (Deaf Riders)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions pursuant to his Answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *553*, on motor cycles and deaf riders, if he will state his Department's definition of hearing impaired. [19764]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are consulting with the Royal National Institute for Deaf Persons and the British Deaf Association about how best to implement the concession we have announced, but it is our broad intention that "hearing impaired" will refer to any person whose hearing capacity is not sufficient to allow them to receive instructions by radio whilst undergoing training on a motor cycle. The application of the concession will be dependent on the needs of individual learner riders.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19969]

Angela Eagle: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

EU Presidency (Environmental Audit)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to arrange for an environmental audit to be conducted of each six-monthly EU presidency. [20002]

Angela Eagle: The environment is an important theme in the Government's objectives for the UK Presidency of the European Union. The Government are currently considering ways of taking this forward and will make an announcement in due course.

Integrated Transport White Paper

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the integrated transport white paper will be published. [20006]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are proposing to publish the White Paper on integrated transport policy in spring 1998.

Castle Cement (Bellman Quarry Application)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he received from local residents regarding the Bellman Quarry application by Castle Cement at Clitheroe. [20133]

Mr. Raynsford: Prior to officially notifying the Local Planning Authority on 22 October that he did not wish to call in this planning application, the Secretary of State received 14 representations from 5 local residents and from the Bellman Quarry Action Group.

He subsequently received some 60 representations from Clitheroe residents and some 40 representations from people outside the town.

Four-wheel Drive Vehicles (Off-road Use)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will assess the advantages of introducing legislation further to control the off-road use of four-wheel drive vehicles in publicly accessible countryside for leisure purposes. [20138]

Angela Eagle: We have been considering the responses to last year's consultation exercise on managing vehicles on rights of way. We intend to make an announcement shortly. Local highway authorities already have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to prevent or restrict traffic on rights of way where they cause damage.

Genetically Engineered Oilseed Rape

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of using genetically engineered oilseed rape to produce plastic polymers in leaves and seeds; and if he will make a statement. [20254]

Angela Eagle: Under the current legislation no releases of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) may be carried out without the prior consent of the Secretary of State. To date, no applications for consent to release oilseed rape genetically modified for the production of plastics into the environment have been made. The possibility that development work may continue to field trials in the future has been anticipated by the Department. The release of these genetically modified plants may pose unique risks to human health and the environment which could include toxicity and allergenicity to humans, gene transfer to other oilseed rape crops and effects on other species.

A research contract has been let to the University of Aberystwyth with three aims: to evaluate the current status of development of these novel types of GMOs; to identify particular risks that they pose to human health and the environment; and to recommend risk management procedures. The results of this research, which will be completed in April 1999, will be used by the Department to consider whether consents may be granted for releases of these GMOs into the environment, and what level of management would be necessary to ensure that the risk to human health and the environment is minimised.

Planning Applications

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many representations he received from local residents in relation to the last planning application he refused as a result of such representations; [20131]

(2) on how many occasions he has used the local representation rule to deny planning permission; and to which schemes he has applied this rule. [20127]

Mr. Raynsford: There is no such thing as "the local representation rule". The views of local residents are among the matters my right hon. Friend takes into account in deciding called-in planning applications or planning appeals. Any decision to grant or refuse planning permission is based on a number of considerations, not simply the local representations received.

Casinos (Health and Safety)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* improvement notices, *(b)* prohibition notices and *(c)* prosecutions have been initiated against casinos for breaches or alleged breaches of health and safety legislation in each of the last three years; and how many inspections of casinos for health and safety purposes have been conducted in each of the last three years. [20123]

Angela Eagle: Information in the form requested is not readily available. However the following information is available.

The Health and Safety Executive publishes annual statistical information on local authority enforcement of health and safety. This is organised in seven broad categories, one of these is for Consumer, Leisure and Cultural Services which includes details for enforcement activities in casinos.

The following table provides details of the enforcement action and inspections carried out by local authorities in all Leisure and Cultural Services, including casinos, in each of the last three years.

Year	*Preventive inspections*[1]	*Total inspections*[1]	*Improvement notices*[1]	*Prohibition notices*[1]	*Total notices*[1]	*Informations laid*[2]	*Convictions*[2]
1993–94	15,000	28,000	780	170	950	23	15
1994–95	16,000	30,000	680	180	860	42	33
1995–96	15,000	29,000	370	140	510	22	12

[1] All figures are grossed up to 460 local authorities and rounded.
[2] Based on actual figures.

Eurotunnel (Passenger Lists)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to require Eurotunnel shuttle trains to list individual passengers travelling on their trains. [20401]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no such plans. Neither, so far as we are aware, do the French Government.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he has held with Eurotunnel authorities and ferry companies on the implications of the draft directive requiring the listing of each passenger travelling across the English Channel. [20400]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Transport Council in June reached political agreement on a draft Directive requiring the listing of passengers on sea services of more than 20 miles within the European Union. We have since consulted the shipping and ports industries informally on which services might justifiably be exempted from such a requirement and on how the requirement might most conveniently be implemented. Formal consultation will be undertaken on the draft regulations which would transpose the draft Directive into UK law.

Stena Invicta

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the evacuation trial of the Stena Invicta in January 1996; [20595]

(2) what recommendations were put forward following the evacuation trial of the Stena Invicta in January 1996. [20596]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* A copy of the report, published by the Marine Safety Agency on 20 May 1996, will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The report contains four recommendations which appear on pages 29 and 30. These cover development of additional guidance on emergency procedures; investigation of why some liferafts inflated very slowly during the test evacuation; examination of launching procedures to ensure an uninterrupted supply of liferafts; and further investigation of ferry evacuation times, using formal safety assessment techniques where appropriate.

Ferries

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if ferries operating from United Kingdom ports are required to have self-righting inflatable life rafts. [20601]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* In accordance with the 1995 amendments to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention, either self righting liferafts or canopied reversible liferafts must be fitted to all new ro-ro passenger ferries after 1 July 1998 and to existing ships at their first periodical survey after 1 July 2000.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those ferries operating to and from United Kingdom ports which meet the SOLAS 90 and SOLAS 95 standards and the dates that they are expected to comply with these standards. [20598]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The SOLAS '90 stability requirements were overtaken by the requirements of the Stockholm Agreement which came into force on 1 April 1997. The Agreement, allowed under a resolution adopted by the 1995 Conference to amend the SOLAS Convention, specifies a stability standard for ferries operating to and from ports in North West Europe and the Baltic Sea, higher than that specified in the revised Convention for application worldwide. The Marine Safety Agency (MSA) published a list showing compliance dates on 1 April 1997. Other 1995 amendments to the SOLAS Convention, not related to stability, are currently being implemented in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list all accidents involving United Kingdom-registered ferries during the last three years. [20597]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Marine Accident Investigation Branch, which was established in 1989, investigates accidents to United Kingdom ships or other vessels in United Kingdom territorial waters. If appropriate, a report of the investigation is published. Two reports have been published of investigations of accidents involving UK registered ferries in the last three years, as follows:

Nature of accident	*Ferry company*	*Date of accident*
Stranding	Stena Sealink	19 September 1995
Heavy weather damage	P and O Euro Ferries (Portsmouth)	14 December 1995

Other accidents to ferries which have been subject to inspectors' investigation in the same period are:

Nature of accident	*Ferry company*	*Date of accident*
Heavy weather damage	P and O Euro Ferries (Felix) Ltd.	21 February 1996
Collision and contacts	Red Funnel Group	9 March 1997

Other more minor accidents have also been reported to MAIB during the period.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those ferries operating to and from United Kingdom ports which meet the safety standards set down in the Stockholm Agreement; and, for those that do not meet the standards, what the date is for compliance. [20599]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The list was published on 1 April 1997. A revised list will be published, following the current ferry refit season, on 1 April 1998.

Estonia

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he proposes to take following the publication of the report into the 'Estonia' disaster. [20600]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* We have just received a copy of the report. Our initial assessment is that all of its recommendations have already been addressed by the 1995 amendments to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention. When we have completed consideration, we will discuss with European colleagues whether any further action is necessary for suggestion to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

The report also acknowledges that the problem of water on the car deck has already been addressed by the Stockholm Agreement of which the UK is a signatory.

Marine Safety

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to implement the recommendation contained in the Donaldson Report relating to guidance given by masters on safety margins relating to bad weather. [20482]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Recommendation 51(c) of the Report of Lord Donaldson's Inquiry states that the UK Government should seek to ensure that safety margins are respected by seeking, through international bodies, to persuade all shipowners both to issue guidance on safety margins and to monitor regularly Masters' compliance with it. This has been implemented. The International Safety Management (ISM) Code will require shipping companies to develop, implement and maintain a safety management system. Following consultation with industry, the Marine Safety Agency issued a Merchant Shipping Notice in May 1995, detailing voluntary certification under the ISM Code to apply in advance of its mandatory application from 1 July 1998.

Railtrack

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will call for a report on the Railtrack TOWS system in respect of *(a)* its safety and *(b)* noise pollution; and if he will make a statement. [20154]

Ms Glenda Jackson: TOWS (Track Operating Warning System) is an essential piece of equipment to protect staff working on or near railway tracks by providing an audible warning. It is generally installed in settings where other methods such as posting a look-out would be dangerous. It is switched on as necessary by staff who are going to work on the track protected by the system and turned off when leaving the site. When it is not reasonably practicable to stop trains running before carrying out routine inspection or maintenance work, TOWS is the preferred system used for ensuring staff safety.

I am advised by the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate that TOWS emits sound at a level necessary for its function and HSE is not aware of any widespread concern over any ancillary noise nuisance, which would be a matter of the Local Authority to purse. I see no need to call for a report on TOWS.

Parish Councils

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will increase the threshold above which parish councils must have their accounts audited by the nominees of the district council. [20896]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no plans to change the arrangements for the audit of parish councils' accounts.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from parish councils regarding the choice of auditors for their accounts; and if he will make it his policy to allow parish councils to choose their own auditors from a nominated list held by the Audit Commission. [20897]

Mr. Raynsford: We have received some representations from small parish councils about the cost of audit following the changes introduced by the Accounts and Audit Regulations in 1996. We have no plans to amend the current parish audit arrangements which conform to good audit practice, including that of the auditor's appointment being made independently of the body subject to audit.

Airports

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria are used by his Department in determining whether to grant transatlantic fifth freedom rights from regional airports. [20813]

Ms Glenda Jackson: When considering the strategy for air services negotiations, in which the granting of transatlantic fifth freedom rights from regional airports might be an issue, the Department takes into account the needs of consumers, airports, the UK carriers and the overall UK economy.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library copies of all the bids by eligible local authorities in England for transport supplementary grant in 1998–99; [20563]

(2) what is the total sum of bids made in this year's bidding round for expenditure on local authority capital transport schemes for each of the next three years. [20564]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested by the hon. Member has been placed in the Library. Total bids for 1998–99 amount to £1.69 billion. Under the TPP system bids are invited for one year's expenditure at a time. In this year's round local authorities have therefore not been asked to bid further ahead than 1998–99. They may quote forecasts of expenditure on major projects for later years, but these figures are generally no more than a guide.

Road Accidents (A38)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been reported on the A38 between Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield in each of the last 15 years; and how many fatalities have resulted. [20553]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is in the table.

Accidents and fatalities on the A38 between Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield: 1982–96

Accidents/casualties

Year	*Accidents*	*Fatalities*
1982	19	0
1983	14	1
1984	28	0
1985	28	2
1986	40	2
1987	25	1
1988	31	2
1989	36	1
1990	32	2
1991	19	2
1992	22	1
1993	29	0
1994	36	0
1995	42	0
1996	43	1

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been reported on the A38 on or near the junction with the A5 at Weeford in each of the last 15 years; and how many fatalities have resulted. [20554]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is on the following table.

Accidents and fatalities on A38 near or on junction with A5 at Weeford: 1982–96

Accidents casualties

Year	*Accidents*	*Fatalities*
1982	13	0
1983	5	0
1984	4	0
1985	7	0
1986	6	0
1987	6	0
1988	7	0
1989	17	0
1990	4	0
1991	15	1
1992	7	0
1993	12	0
1994	10	0
1995	9	0
1996	11	0

Car Use (Inner London)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the

Government have to introduce charges for the use of cars within inner London. [20557]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Both our national transport consultation document "Developing an Integrated Transport Policy" and the London governance Green Paper "New Leadership for London", raised the issue of using the price mechanism to influence travel choice, including the possibility of charging for road use.

We are looking with an open mind at the advantages and disadvantages of the full range of options for influencing travel choice, and considering the potential economic and social impact of new policies. However, no decisions have yet been taken about what either the London Governance White Paper (due to be published in March) or the Integrated Transport White Paper (which will follow later in the Spring) will say on this issue. Any new compulsory charging regimes would require primary legislation before they could be implemented.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the budget for the Energy Saving Trust in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [20648]

Angela Eagle: In 1996–97, my Department provided £25,000,000 in grant funding for the Energy Saving Trust. Funding of up to £19,000,000 has been made available for 1997–98.

Air Services

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will instruct his officials to open negotiations with the Malaysian Government in order to secure direct air services between Manchester and Kuala Lumpur before the 1998 Commonwealth Games. [20816]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The operation of direct air services between Manchester and Kuala Lumpur is a matter for the commercial judgment of the designated carriers of the two countries. We would consider any request for talks to review the present air services arrangements.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of a mandate being given to the Commissioner of the European Union to negotiate bilateral air service agreements with other countries. [20733]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The UK supported the mandates granted by the Transport Council to the European Commission to negotiate aviation agreements with Norway and Sweden in 1990, with Switzerland in 1995 and with ten central and eastern European (CEE) countries in 1996 (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). The Commission's negotiations with Switzerland and with the CEE countries are continuing. We would welcome the extension of the aviation single market to these countries, provided there is no distortion of competition or dilution of safety standards. This should increase opportunities for UK travellers, UK airlines and UK airports, leading to greater choice and lower fares.

In 1996 the UK was isolated in opposing the granting of a limited mandate to the Commission to enter into preliminary discussions with the US on a possible regulatory framework for EC/US air services. The Commission's subsequent request for a mandate for comprehensive negotiations with the US including market access is currently under discussion in Brussels, but several Member States, including the UK, have expressed doubts about the practicability of the Commission's proposal. Our priority objective is to bring our current bilateral negotiations with the US to a successful conclusion, which would bring benefits for travellers in the UK and throughout the Community.

We would consider any future proposal for authorising the Commission to negotiate air services agreements with third countries on their merits.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what specific *(a)* quantified and *(b)* unquantified factors are used by the CAA to assess regional economic benefits in its economic analysis prepared before air service negotiations. [20815]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The quantified and unquantified factors used by the CAA to assess regional benefits in its economic analyses are set out in a paper CAP638 "The Economic Impact of New Air Services", published in November 1994. I am arranging for copies of this document to be placed in the House Library.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons his Department has not agreed to allow Air Jamaica rights to operate passenger flights to Manchester Airport. [20814]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Air Jamaica has not applied for flights to Manchester this season.

Vehicle Approval Test

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the percentage of American cars currently being driven legally in the United Kingdom which would fail the proposed single vehicle approval test; and if he will make a statement. [20710]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Such an assessment is not necessary. When SVA is introduced, it will apply only to vehicles first registered in Great Britain after the appointed date. Vehicles already licensed and registered will not be affected.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the proposed single vehicle approval test with EU rules on the free movement of goods; what representations he has received from the Commissioner for Transport on the matter; and if he will make a statement. [20708]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Single Vehicle Approval is not harmonised at European level. Nevertheless, our proposals took full account of our obligations under the

Treaty of Rome, and the proposed arrangements are similar to schemes operating in some other member states. The European Commission has instructed us to defer implementing the proposals set out in our recent consultation. This instruction is part of a legal procedure that governs the making of technical regulations which have trade implications within the EU. We remain confident that the British SVA scheme does not have any adverse effect on the internal market, whilst removing barriers to trade with other parts of the world. A further announcement will be made when discussions with the Commission have been concluded.

London Government

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what academic studies have been commissioned by the Government Office for London into alternative electoral systems for the election of a London Mayor and a London Assembly. [20392]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government Office for London has commissioned a report about election of the London Mayor and the London Assembly—the Greater London Authority—from Professor Patrick Dunleavy (LSE) and Dr. Helen Margetts (Birkbeck College). When we receive the final version of their report a copy will be placed in the Library.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the names of all those people who he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19972]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is contained in the publication "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales" which is available in the House of Commons Library. The information is updated quarterly.

Church Accountability

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to increase the parliamentary accountability of the Church of Wales. [20130]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Church of Wales is accountable to its Governing Body. I have no intention of seeking to alter this position.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the hourly rates of pay for full-time employees in his Department in the range of £4.39 an hour to £3.17 an hour; and how many people receive each such hourly rate of pay in each region defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices. [20603]

Angela Eagle: A total of 1,351 full-time employees can earn between £4.39 an hour and £3.17 an hour.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time employees in his Department are paid at an hourly rate of between *(a)* £3.30 and £3.50, *(b)* £3.51 and £3.75 and *(c)* £3.76 and £4. [20611]

Mr. Ron Davies: The number of full-time employees, including casual staff, on 30 November 1997, based on gross hours of 42 hours per week is as follows:

(a) 203

(b) 39

(c) 79

Figures exclude staff in CADW.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will provide a breakdown of how the rebate of £45 million resulting from the deregulation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland has been spent. [19513]

Mr. Ingram: The Government announced on 25 November 1997 that £5 million of the remaining £45 million Government support for electricity consumers was to be allocated to an expansion of the Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme. The annual target number of homes of the elderly and low income families to be insulated and/or draughtproofed under the Scheme is to be increased from 14,000 to 20,000, creating an estimated 40 new jobs in the process. Consideration is being given as to how best the remaining £40 million might be spent on measures to help electricity consumers in Northern Ireland. I hope to make an announcement in the near future.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish the names of all those people she has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and whether they receive remuneration. [19981]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have placed in the Library a list of those individuals who have been appointed to public bodies in Northern Ireland in the period 1 May to 5 December 1997, with details of their position and whether they receive remuneration.

Violence against Women

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what EU initiatives she proposes relating to violence against women. [19911]

Mr. Worthington: I am aware that the European Women's Lobby is proposing to hold a conference for non-governmental organisations on domestic violence during the UK Presidency of the European Union. I welcome this and will try to support it in whatever way I can. In my view, Northern Ireland would be an ideal location for such an event. The Northern Ireland Regional Forum on Domestic Violence and the more recent local networks provide a good model for effective inter-agency

working in this field. We are bringing forward new legislation to strengthen and extend the law in Northern Ireland to protect women from domestic violence.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish details of the goods and services provided by the RUC under the Home Office Exports Initiative. [20010]

Mr. Michael: I have been asked to reply.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary played no part in the Home Office Exports Initiative.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deparmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19316]

Dr. David Clark: The Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service), employs two special advisers, and I refer the hon. Member to my earlier replies to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*, for details of the total paybill for all special advisers.

The Better Regulation Task Force reports to the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service), and has fifteen external members. All members are unpaid apart from their travel expenses, as was the case before 1 May 1997[1].

[1] It is not possible to distinguish the cost of officials' time spent on Task Force and Review related work.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration.[19973]

Dr. David Clark: The public bodies for which I am responsible are: The Civil Service Appeal Board; the Better Regulation Task Force; The Advisory Committee on Advertising and The Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. I have made the following appointments since 1 May 1997:

CIVIL SERVICE APPEAL BOARD:

M. E. G. Fogden (Official Side Panel Member)

THE BETTER REGULATION TASK FORCE:

Chairperson

Chrisopher Haskins

Deputy Chairperson

Teresa Graham

Members

Stephen Alambritis

Sarah Anderson

Alan Charlesworth

Hugh Field

Ram Gidoomal

Sir Simon Gourlay

Pamela Meadows

Robert Purry

Chai Patel

Peter Salsbury

Helena Shovelton

Sue Slipman

Ed Sweeney

THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES ON JUSTICES OF THE PEACE IN LANCASHIRE, GREATER MANCHESTER AND MERSEYSIDE

Members

Mr. R. Matthews, JP

Mrs. B. G. Jones

Mr. C. J. Starkey

Mr. J. Alexander, JP

Mr. D. Bentham, JP

Mrs. M. S. Dutton, JP

Mrs. J. Brittain, JP

Mrs. B. Kilfoyle, JP

Mr. H. M. Winik, JP

Mrs. M. A. Bishop, JP

Mrs. C. Nancollas, JP

Mrs. J. Hurlston

Mrs. A. Saltsman, JP

Mrs. S. Marston, JP

Mrs. L. Worsley, JP

Ms A. H. Martin

Mr. W. A. Fletcher, JP.

No member of any Cabinet Office (OPS) Public Body receives a salary. Members of the Civil Service Appeal Board receive a daily attendance rate.

Open Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of Open Government. [20403]

Dr. David Clark: Our proposals for opening up government with a radical Freedom of Information Act are set out in the White Paper "Your Right to Know" (*Cm 3818*) which I presented to the House on 11 December 1997.

Special Advisers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if a special adviser in his Department has made unauthorised disclosures of information regarding the Government White Paper on Freedom of Information. [20880]

Dr. David Clark: Neither of my special advisers has made any unauthorised disclosure of information regarding the White Paper on Freedom of Information "Your Right to Know".

I gave clear instructions to my Department that contracts with the media in the run-up to the publication of the White Paper should not go beyond matters already in the public domain, and my special advisers acted fully in conformity with those instructions.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20524]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* In accordance with the guidelines produced by the CCTA in September 1996, all new contracts between my Department and non-governmental organisations and suppliers for systems, goods or services that might be adversely affected by non-compliance now include a clause on millennium compliance. For contracts for such products which were already in existence, plans are in place and remedial work is in hand to ensure that any systems, goods or services provided by these non-governmental organisations or suppliers will be millennium compliant in good time.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Justice Reform

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those insurers who have to date agreed to support the Lord Chancellor's reforms of the civil justice system; and if he will provide insurance for litigants acting under conditional fees arrangements. [20681]

Mr. Hoon: While the Lord Chancellor, myself and officials have had discussions with insurers about insurance for conditional fee agreements, we have not thought it necessary to seek the support of these, or any other, insurers for the proposed reforms to the civil justice system.

The provisions of insurance must be a matter for insurers. As I have told the hon. and learned Gentleman before, the insurance industry has reacted positively to the proposal to extend the conditional fees scheme and we have been encouraged by the creative approach being taken to developing affordable products.

Legal Aid

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those insurance companies and brokers with whom he has held discussions since 18 October about his proposals to reform the legal aid system. [20682]

Mr. Hoon: The precise details of meetings arranged since 18 October are as follows: on 29 October officials met representatives of the Association of British Insurers; on 14 November the Lord Chancellor met the Chairman of Abbey Legal Protection Ltd.; on 19 November officials met representatives of Litigation Protection Ltd.; on 2 December the Lord Chancellor met representatives of the ABI, DAS, Abbey Legal Protection, Legal Protection Group, Litigation Protection Ltd., Greystoke Legal Services Ltd., R. E. Brown and others and Lloyd's and Law Club Legal Protection (Cornhill Group); on 3 December officials attended a seminar organised by Abbey Legal Protection; and, on 4 December officials met representatives of Peak Insurance Services. Arrangements are also being made for the first meeting of the working group of insurance industry representatives and officials to be held in the new year.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19967]

Mr. Hoon: The names of those appointed are listed in the table. There were also two appointments to the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Appointment of Juvenile Court Lay Panel Members (an NDPB in Northern Ireland): one chairman and one member. These names are not included.

Those not receiving remuneration

Name	*Name*
Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace	
G. W. Tyson Esq.	Mrs J. A. Greenough JP
Mrs. J. Earl JP	Mrs. D. Goff JP
R. B. Edwards Esq.	G. D. Harcourt Esq JP
Mrs. A. E. Chapman	W. A. B. Hobbs Esq.
Mrs. R. C. Foster	Mrs. J. Jackson
Mrs. S. Hinton JP	Mrs. S. M. Kay JP
Mrs. L. M. Lamont JP	A. J. Lester Esq JP
P. Dass Esq. JP	G. Y. Messenger Esq. JP
Mrs. R. A. Scot JP	Mrs. L. D. Shaw JP
C. E. Whitmore-Jones JP	B. M. Smith Esq. JP
A. G. Yeatman DL JP	J. H. Smith Esq. JP
A. Downton Esq. JP	I. Smith Esq.
Mrs. J. Robertson JP	Mrs. M. Thorne JP
Mrs. A. R. Grange JP	P. Wroe Esq. JP
Mrs. M. Sitaram JP	J. S. Robertson Esq. JP
Mrs. J. C. Wilson-Ward JP	R. K. P. Windass Esq.
Mrs. K. A. Dover JP	Mrs. J. Cook
Mrs. H. R. Tulloch JP	R. Spence Esq.
K. M. Ridewood Esq. JP	Mrs. J. M. Atkinson JP
K. E. Sharp Esq. JP	R. Bates Esq. JP
P. G. Jarvis OBE JP	D. G. Blakeley Esq. JP
Mrs. T. J. F. Okubadejo	Mrs. P. Woodley JP
Mrs. D. M. Heller JP	D. Mills Esq. JP
Mrs. J. Litton JP	K. Gorton Esq. JP
C. S. Walling JP	Sir Paul Nicholson
His Honour Judge D. Griffiths	Mrs. I. A. Grant JP
R. J. G. Farmers JP	A. J. Coltman Esq.
Mrs. K. Peterson-Hann JP	Mrs. R. M. Monckton-Miles JP
The Right Reverend G. R. James	Mrs. C. A. Duff
P. W. Davies Esq.	Mrs. A. Alcott JP
Mrs. A. Pitcher	A. D. Marshall Esq. JP
Mrs. H. Penberthy	Mrs. J. Woods-Scawen JP
M. D. Beazor Esq.	Mrs. J. M. Handbury
P. J. Zisimos Esq. JP	Mrs. S. E. A. H. Wassell JP
Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Kennedy GCB, AFC	G. S. I. Lloyd Esq. JP
	Mrs. S. E. Thompson JP
R. D. K. Harris Esq.	J. L. Jones Esq. JP
W. Shacklady Esq.	Mrs. M. A. Campbell JP
Dr. J. M. Jackson	M. G. Downs Esq. JP
A. D. Unwin Esq. JP	D. H. Bradnock Esq. JP
Mrs. E. V. Baglin-Jones JP	M. H. Gee Esq.
Mrs. D. Bagnall JP	Mrs. V. D. Phillips
Mrs. P. D. Bowes JP	H. J. Tombs JP
D. R. Cherry Esq. JP	Dr. L. H. Williams

Those not receiving remuneration

Name	*Name*
Mrs. R. K. Duckett	Lady Beryl Davies
Mrs. S. J. Jarman JP	Ms L. Kretchmer JP
Mrs. C. E. Harvard'	' G. R. Price Esq. JP
Mrs. G. M. Riley JP'	' B. D. Parson Esq.
Mrs. J. Child JP'	' Mrs. H. E. Murray JP
Mrs. J. Anthony JP'	' Mrs. S. Telling
Mrs. S. F. Cullen JP'	' R. C. Dykes Esq.
G. B. Wright JP'	' Rev. C. O. Weaver Esq. JP
Mrs. J. Spencer JP'	' J. Muncey Esq.
Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax	
C. M. Young. Esq	C. W. M. Cornelius
Mrs. A. M. Jeater	Captain B. C. M. Lewis
T. G. Brinklow Esq.	Mrs. P. J. Gee
R. J. Hall Esq.	Mrs. A. D. Pendle
C. E. N. Howard Esq.	P. L. Taylor Esq.
C. W. L. Cary Esq.	D. Lowsley-Williams
T. Flynn Esq.	Rev. P. M. Thomas
Colonel C. Herbert Esq.	Mrs. A. R. Williams
Miss J. Hogg	A. S. Marilyn Esq.
G. R. Simpson Esq.	' W. J. Watson Esq.
H. G. Platt Esq.	' M. J. Kenrick Esq.
J. Bruce Jones Esq.	' R. C. Bettinson Esq.
Mrs. S. M. Bosanquet JP	' M. Farooq Esq.
W. H. Phillips Esq. JP	' Miss A. M. White
Civil Procedure Rule Committee	
Mr. Justice May	His Honour Judge Holman
Master Leslie.	Peter Watson
Olivia Morrison-Lyons	Henrietta Manners
Peter Haworth	Harriet Kimbell
District Judge Gypps	David Foskett QC
Nicholas Chambers QC	David Greene

Those receiving remuneration

Name	*Name*
Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct	
Lord Saville of Newdigate (draws his judicial salary)	John Nutting QC
Judicial Studies Board: to its Magisterial Committee	
Mrs. Judith Pitchers JP	Mr. Don Manley JP
Council on Tribunals	
Mrs. A. Galbraith	D. G. Readings Esq.
P. A. A. Waring Esq.	

' Recent appointments, and therefore not included in the answer to your previous question.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many full-time employees in his Department are paid at an hourly rate of between *(a)* £3.30 and £3.50, *(b)* £3.51 and £3.75 and *(c)* £3.76 and £4. [20610]

Mr. Hoon: This answer covers the Headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department (with Associated Offices), the Court Service, Public Trust Office, Land Registry, Public Record Office and Northern Ireland Court Service.

In LCD HQ (with Associated Offices), the minimum hourly rate payable is £3.44 but there are no full-time staff currently in receipt of hourly rates in any of the ranges specified. There are similarly no full-time staff in the Public Trust Office, the Public Record Office or the Northern Ireland Court Service in receipt of hourly rates within any of the ranges. In the Court Service, there are 202 full-time staff (49 permanent, 153 casual) in receipt of hourly rates in the range £3.30–£3.50, none in the range £3.51–£3.75 and one in the range £3.76–£4.00. These figures do not include a negotiated uplift due to take effect for permanent staff in April 1998. In the Land Registry, there is one full-time member of staff in the range of £3.76–£4.00, but no staff in the other ranges.

SCOTLAND

Education (Higher Still)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many practising secondary school English teachers are members of the Higher Still English Development Group. [19807]

Mr. Wilson: The current Higher Still reference group for English and Communication comprises 8 members, 2 of whom are practising English teachers, with the other members drawn from secondary, further and higher education, Her Majesty's Inspectorate and the Higher Still Development Unit.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the administrative arrangements for Higher Still in English and Communications. [19803]

Mr. Wilson: The Arrangements documents for Higher Still English and Communication, as for other subjects, were issued earlier this year, following an extensive consultation process with the teaching profession. Partnership with the profession has been a key factor throughout the development of the Higher Still Programme and this is continuing as we work towards successful implementation.

Sixth Year Students

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve the quality of the Scottish sixth year, both for advanced higher and non-advanced higher students. [20543]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Higher Still Programme is designed to provide a progressive educational experience leading to meaningful nationally recognised qualifications for all students in Scottish fifth and sixth years. From August 1999 new qualifications will be available to students in schools and colleges at five levels, offering progression from whatever level of prior attainment a student has achieved.

Athletics Coaching

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure the continuation of professional athletics coaching in Scotland. [19774]

Mr. Galbraith: The Scottish Sports Council is continuing to provide support to the Scottish Athletics Federation and has recently entered discussions with the Federation about its plans to introduce a new structure for

Scottish athletics from April 1998. These discussions will address a range of issues, including the provision of coaching.

Education Authority Spending

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was average per capita spending in each education authority in primary schools and secondary schools on *(a)* books and *(b)* other educational materials and equipment (i) in the current session, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1992, (iv) 1987 and (v) 1977 in constant prices. [19776]

Mr. Wilson: Details of expenditure on schools for the current financial year are not yet available. The information available for the other financial years concerned is given in the following tables which have been compiled from local authority financial returns. Expenditure on other educational materials and equipment was not separately identified before 1982–83. There have been some variations from year to year in the recording of expenditure under these two headings. It is, therefore, possible that some expenditure on books may be included under expenditure on equipment or vice versa.

Expenditure per primary pupil on text and library books and on educational tools, equipment and materials, adjusted to 1997–98 prices using the GDP deflator

Primary £

	1977–78		1987–88		1992–93		1994–95	
Region	*Books*	*Equipment*	*Books*	*Equipment*	*Books*	*Equipment*	*Books*	*Equipment*
Borders	11.47	n/a	18.58	0.38	14.57	45.84	0.00	73.94
Central	7.51	n/a	1.38	34.17	1.21	42.58	0.70	37.56
Dumfries and Galloway	13.09	n/a	13.70	21.63	14.36	56.22	17.68	70.97
Fife	6.77	n/a	12.26	11.04	9.02	17.97	23.26	6.41
Grampian	11.88	n/a	18.13	15.79	0.00	58.18	0.00	61.06
Highland	0.00	n/a	65.68	0.00	80.30	0.00	35.33	35.96
Lothian	10.94	n/a	9.85	11.82	16.92	25.14	21.31	34.44
Strathclyde	13.56	n/a	12.08	20.19	17.19	27.13	3.29	42.32
Tayside	8.10	n/a	9.50	28.16	12.80	22.27	13.77	36.58
Orkney	30.29	n/a	13.86	22.52	15.46	21.64	0.00	63.03
Shetland	35.6.1	n/a	22.86	13.72	24.84	42.44	0.00	97.22
Western Isles	10.15	n/a	17.98	22.21	39.15	62.81	32.07	74.96

Expenditure per secondary pupil on text and library books on educational tools, equipment and materials, adjusted to 1997–98 prices using the GDP deflator

Secondary £

	1977–78		1987–88		1992–93		1994–95	
Region	*Books*	*Equipment*	*Books*	*Equipment*	*Books*	*Equipment*	*Books*	*Equipment*
Borders	13.40	n/a	59.18	0.49	18.28	144.57	0.00	166.74
Central	14.90	n/a	5.14	101.80	4.99	116.16	2.82	99.63
Dumfries and Galloway	24.23	n/a	19.26	106.71	11.45	140.09	11.91	147.32
Fife	15.51	n/a	16.88	114.92	14.23	78.64	63.73	21.12
Grampian	24.60	n/a	18.97	72.15	0.00	135.34	0.00	143.21
Highland	0.00	n/a	112.40	0.00	131.73	0.00	59.03	51.47
Lothian	21.04	n/a	13.64	51.75	13.26	77.09	11.58	83.23
Strathclyde	22.85	n/a	14.06	62.83	19.46	80.96	4.15	86.10
Tayside	11.83	n/a	11.16	110.03	11.83	109.82	11.71	91.10
Orkney	43.66	n/a	40.49	40.49	20.06	58.57	0.00	120.58
Shetland	93.23	n/a	125.67	53.99	52.22	151.51	0.00	204.72
Western Isles	18.43	n/a	16.26	61.27	0.00	149.09	59.98	92.39

1. Not all education authorities distinguish on a consistent basis between the two headings
2. Where expenditure under one of the headings is shown as £0.00 it should be assumed that the expenditure has been allocated to the other heading.

Students

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the Regulations currently used to determine student's eligibility for grants or loans. [19801]

Mr. Wilson: The Regulations used to determine Scottish domiciled students' eligibility for a student grant are The Student's Allowances (Scotland) Regulations, 1996 S.I No. 1754 (S.145), as amended by The Education Authority Bursaries and Students' Allowances (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, S.I 1997 No. 1049 (S.94). These are supplemented by the booklet "Student Grants in Scotland—A Guide to Undergraduate Students' Allowances". The Regulations governing eligibility for a student loan are The Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1997, S.I 1997 No. 1675, which apply throughout Great Britain.

Copies of the Regulations and the booklet are available in the Library.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the availability of supplementary allowances for students to cover *(a)* disability, *(b)* travel, *(c)* a second home and *(d)* other costs. [19760]

Mr. Wilson: From academic year 1998–99, the Disabled Students' Allowance will cease to be means-tested and will continue to be available in the form of a grant to all students.

In academic year 1998–99, students who are already in higher education will continue to be able to apply for assistance in the form of supplementary allowances for travel, a second home and other costs until they complete or abandon their present programme of study. Students who enter higher education for the first time in academic year 1998–99 will be eligible for these allowances on the same basis for that year.

The move to 100 per cent. loans for maintenance in academic year 1999–2000 will require some modification of the arrangements for supplementary allowances. We are still considering the details of these arrangements, but we hope to announce our plans shortly.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make the transitional rules for grants or loans apply for all three or four years of the university or college course of entrants in 1998. [19943]

Mr. Wilson: No. The transitional arrangements for new students entering in academic year 1998–99 will apply for that year only. The loan will comprise about 75 per cent. of the maintenance support package and the means-tested grant will account for the balance of about 25 per cent.

From academic year 1999–2000, standard maintenance grants will be replaced by loans. Graduates will be asked to repay the loans only once they are earning more than £10,000 per annum and the level of repayments will be linked to their income.

Teachers

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many secondary and primary school teachers were newly employed by each Scottish education authority on *(a)* permanent contracts and *(b)* short term temporary contracts in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) each of the previous three years. [19778]

Mr. Wilson: No figures are yet available for 1997–98 or 1996–97. Information available for the previous three years is given in the tables, in which the figures relate only to contracts of three months or over.

First appointments to teaching in Scotland, 1993–94 by Education Authority and sector

	Primary	*Secondary*	*Total*
Total	441	510	951
Highland	30	20	50
Grampian	76	64	140
Tayside	72	37	109
Fife	27	59	86
Lothian	69	9	78
Scottish Borders	17	13	30
Central	20	47	67
Dumfries and Galloway	22	36	58
Orkney Islands	2	2	4
Shetland Islands	5	7	12
Western Isles	2	9	11
Argyll and Bute	11	11	22
Ayr	2	15	17
Dunbarton	35	35	70
Glasgow, City of	28	33	61
Lanarkshire	14	87	101
Renfrew	9	26	35

First appointments to teaching in Scotland, 1994–95 by Education Authority and sector

	Primary	*Secondary*	*Total*
Total	544	470	1,014
Highland	34	27	61
Grampian	85	52	137
Tayside	57	48	105
Fife	47	24	71
Lothian	42	25	67
Scottish Borders	18	23	41
Central	15	44	59
Dumfries and Galloway	28	18	46
Orkney Islands	4	2	6
Shetland Islands	8	7	15
Western Isles	10	10	20
Argyll and Bute	10	11	21
Ayr	36	58	94
Dunbarton	41	29	70
Glasgow, City of	77	38	115
Lanarkshire	31	26	57
Renfrew	1	28	29

First appointments to teaching in Scotland, 1995–96 by Education Authority and sector

	Primary	*Secondary*	*Total*
Total	577	490	1,067
Highland	19	15	34
Grampian	66	59	125
Tayside	72	69	141
Fife	34	18	52
Lothian	53	36	89
Scottish Borders	13	9	22
Central	26	35	61
Dumfries and Galloway	10	19	29
Orkney Islands	3	4	7
Shetland Islands	7	4	11
Western Isles	6	4	10
Argyll and Bute	18	13	31
Ayr	3	4	7
Dunbarton	76	87	163
Glasgow, City of	85	58	143
Lanarkshire	43	16	59
Renfrew	43	40	83

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many FTE specialist teachers in primary schools *(a)* there are in the current session and *(b)* there were in each of the previous five years in each specialty. [19775]

Mr. Wilson: Information is available only for 1992 and 1994 as in the following table:

Education authority primary schools Number (FTE) of specialist teachers in primary schools[1]

Subject specialism	Number of teachers (FTE) 1992	1994
Learning difficulties	914.4	994.9
Art	159.2	142.2
Music	222.8	214.6
Home Economics	103.5	83.0
Physical Education	227.0	223.1
Drama	33.8	31.8
English as a second language	n/a	44.5
Modern Language	16.2	21.1

[1] Excludes foreign teachers. Data will next be collected in September 1998.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new recommendations for the revision of guidelines for the appraisal of teachers have been produced by the National Co-ordinating Committee for the Staff Development of Teachers; and how these will be implemented. [20540]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* I expect to receive the National Co-ordinating Committee's recommendations shortly and to issue new guidelines early next year for incorporation in local authority schemes.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken to ensure that each primary school in Scotland has at least one teacher trained in modern languages. [20541]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* I am continuing the Modern Languages in the Primary School (MLPS) training programme for primary teachers into a fifth phase which will involve 830 teachers. Although in strictly numerical terms sufficient teachers have already been trained to ensure that each Scottish primary school could have at least one trained teacher there are still gaps in provision resulting from staff movement. By the end of school session 1997–98 the total number of teachers trained to teach a modern foreign language to primary school pupils will be around 3,800. Almost £16 million will have been spent on MLPS since the programme began in 1993.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many (i) pupils and (ii) FTE teachers in each education authority there were in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools and in each case what was the pupil-teacher ratio in (1) the current session and (2) each of the last five years. [19777]

Mr. Wilson: Information for the current session is not yet available. Information for the previous five years is given in the table.

Education authority primary schools

Number of pupils, teachers (FTE) and pupil teacher ratio by authority[1]

	1996			1995			1994		
	Total primary pupils	Teachers total FTE	Pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	Teachers total FTE	Pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	Teachers total FTE	Pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	441,225	22,459.8	19.6	440,174	22,541.7	19.5	438,235	22,648.2	19.3
Aberdeen City	16,069	808.9	19.9	15,904	810.4	19.6	15,722	787.1	20.0
Aberdeenshire	21,500	1,157.8	18.6	21,450	1,146.3	18.7	21,406	1,150.7	18.6
Angus	9,433	495.4	19.0	9,446	511.1	18.5	9,468	505.4	18.7
Argyll and Bute	7,809	452.2	17.3	7,780	448.9	17.3	7,750	447.1	17.3
Clackmannanshire	4,498	212.3	21.2	4,402	209.5	21.0	4,377	212.2	20.6
Dumfries and Galloway	12,890	680.6	18.9	12,997	695.8	18.7	12,626	709.5	17.8
Dundee City	12,573	696.9	18.0	12,697	674.8	18.8	12,824	669.1	19.2
East Ayrshire	11,487	545.8	21.0	11,428	549.5	20.8	11,437	557.3	20.5
East Dunbartonshire	10,505	472.8	22.2	10,374	468.0	22.2	20,271	465.7	22.1
East Lothian	7,765	376.9	20.6	7,494	374.6	20.0	7,248	366.7	19.8
East Renfrewshire	8,560	383.3	22.3	8,475	378.1	22.4	8,424	364.5	23.1
Edinburgh, City of	30,642	1,480.5	20.7	30,288	1,487.5	20.4	29,501	1,494.7	19.7
Falkirk	12,287	578.2	21.3	12,219	561.1	21.8	12,078	570.5	21.2
Fife	31,070	1,622.9	19.1	31,163	1,644.0	19.0	31,056	1,633.9	19.0
Glasgow City	49,993	2,599.1	19.2	50,398	2,654.7	19.0	51,019	2,707.7	18.8
Highland	19,194	1,110.4	17.3	19,111	1,106.7	17.3	18,927	1,130.5	16.7
Inverclyde	7,945	370.6	21.4	8,004	384.7	20.8	8,071	385.4	20.9
Midlothian	7,393	372.3	19.9	7,287	368.1	19.8	7,170	363.8	19.7
Moray	8,036	424.5	18.9	7,970	426.5	18.7	7,939	431.7	18.4
North Ayrshire	12,627	597.2	21.1	12,631	601.1	21.0	12,644	607.1	20.8
North Lanarkshire	29,990	1,484.5	20.2	29,942	1,482.5	20.2	30,043	1,497.0	20.1
Orkney Islands	1,848	122.3	15.1	1,879	124.4	15.1	1,841	125.3	14.7
Perth and Kinross	10,668	571.5	18.7	10,554	579.9	18.2	10,554	573.5	18.4
Renfrewshire	15,693	712.2	22.0	15,784	726.4	21.7	15,604	716.1	21.8
Scottish Borders	8,963	485.1	18.5	8,838	476.8	18.5	8,670	483.3	17.9
Shetland Islands	2,304	182.3	12.6	2,286	178.0	12.8	2,247	180.3	12.5
South Ayrshire	9,530	453.3	21.0	9,611	469.5	20.5	9,607	468.3	20.5
South Lanarkshire	26,922	1,300.3	20.7	27,026	1,305.0	20.7	27,091	1,322.7	20.5
Stirling	6,697	342.5	19.6	6,613	332.4	19.9	6,599	336.1	19.6
West Dunbartonshire	9,016	445.0	20.3	9,065	442.2	20.5	9,159	455.9	20.1
West Lothian	14,730	723.7	20.4	14,439	726.0	19.9	14,244	731.8	19.5
Western Isles	2,588	198.5	13.0	2,619	197.2	13.3	2,618	197.3	13.3

[1] Due to rounding the Scotland totals may not be the sum of constituent parts.

Number of pupils, teachers (FTE) and pupil teacher ratio by authority[1]

	1993			1992		
	Total primary pupils	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/teacher ratio*	*Total primary pupils*	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/teacher ratio*
Scotland	438,734	22,662.2	19.4	439,299	22,931.1	19.2
Aberdeen City	15,785	795.7	19.8	15,625	786.5	19.9
Aberdeenshire	21,268	1,152.7	18.5	21,198	1,157.8	18.3
Angus	9,515	491.5	19.4	9,436	480.6	19.6
Argyll and Bute	7,766	447.4	17.4	7,768	467.4	16.6
Clackmannanshire	4,437	220.2	20.1	4,406	218.0	20.2
Dumfries and Galloway	12,672	711.8	17.8	12,751	721.8	17.7
Dundee City	12,868	664.7	19.4	13,029	655.9	19.9
East Ayrshire	11,409	556.9	20.5	11,382	570.5	20.0
East Dunbartonshire	10,168	470.5	21.6	19,184	472.1	21.6
East Lothian	7,095	350.4	20.2	6,890	352.8	19.5
East Renfrewshire	8,271	370.3	22.3	8,072	359.7	22.4
Edinburgh, City of	29,170	1,445.9	20.2	28,528	1,413.6	20.2
Falkirk	12,219	583.1	21.0	12,306	593.8	20.7
Fife	31,170	1,636.9	19.0	31,222	1,641.7	19.0
Glasgow City	51,433	2,747.4	18.7	51,811	2,791.9	18.6
Highland	19,094	1,121.8	17.0	19,329	1,162.1	16.6
Inverclyde	8,038	391.2	20.5	8,130	401.8	20.2
Midlothian	7,220	372.1	19.4	7,116	367.7	19.4
Moray	7,848	427.0	18.4	7,784	428.2	18.2
North Ayrshire	12,809	621.3	20.6	12,931	645.4	20.0
North Lanarkshire	30,215	1,491.0	20.3	39,793	1,549.6	19.9
Orkney Islands	1,821	123.2	14.8	1,832	126.5	14.5
Perth and Kinross	10,430	557.2	18.7	10,324	557.2	18.5
Renfrewshire	15,542	721.1	21.6	15,540	729.8	21.3
Scottish Borders	8,668	482.0	18.0	8,604	489.4	17.6
Shetland Islands	2,222	182.6	12.2	2,207	182.3	12.1
South Ayrshire	9,562	469.4	20.4	9,711	486.5	20.0
South Lanarkshire	27,264	1,324.4	20.6	27,505	1,354.1	20.3
Stirling	6,537	342.6	19.1	6,617	359.1	18.4
West Dunbartonshire	9,373	465.7	20.1	9,431	466.8	20.2
West Lothian	14,191	735.5	19.3	14,189	747.7	19.0
Western Isles	2,654	188.9	14.0	2,648	193.1	13.7

[1] Due to rounding the Scotland totals may not be the sum of constituent parts.

Education authority secondary schools

Number of pupils, teachers (FTE) and pupil teacher ratio by authority[1]

	1996			1995			1994		
	Total secondary pupils	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/ teacher ratio*	*Total secondary pupils*	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/ teacher ratio*	*Total secondary pupils*	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/ teacher ratio*
Scotland	315,912	24,205.9	13.1	316,352	24,556.9	12.9	315,622	24,711.4	12.8
Aberdeen City	11,074	861.3	12.9	11,071	854.9	13.0	11,038	879.0	12.6
Aberdeenshire	15,231	1,101.7	13.8	15,369	1,104.6	13.9	15,231	1,141.1	13.3
Angus	7,287	562.4	13.0	7,208	564.8	12.8	7,127	565.0	12.6
Argyll and Bute	5,639	455.5	12.4	5,730	455.7	12.6	5,709	466.3	12.2
Clackmannanshire	2,927	218.9	13.4	2,944	220.9	13.3	2,934	221.8	13.2
Dumfries and Galloway	9,584	755.3	12.7	9,522	798.7	11.9	9,506	798.9	11.9
Dundee City	8,978	732.8	12.3	8,842	750.2	11.8	8,821	751.6	11.7
East Ayrshire	7,963	590.6	13.5	7,938	612.7	13.0	7,868	595.6	13.2
East Dunbartonshire	8,754	628.4	13.9	8,794	628.3	14.0	8,756	630.1	13.9
East Lothian	4,751	354.0	13.4	4,645	355.8	13.1	4,623	354.0	13.1
East Renfrewshire	6,758	480.6	14.1	6,687	481.4	13.9	6,652	476.0	14.0
Edinburgh, City of	18,706	1,398.7	13.4	18,350	1,430.1	12.8	18,218	1,411.5	12.9
Falkirk	8,667	637.3	13.6	8,701	640.8	13.6	8,751	641.5	13.6
Fife	23,095	1,727.8	13.4	23,215	1,745.0	13.3	22,909	1,739.2	13.2
Glasgow City	29,222	2,352.6	12.4	29,357	2,383.4	12.3	29,487	2,436.9	12.1
Highland	14,960	1,266.7	11.8	15,253	1,270.3	12.0	15,250	1,267.4	12.0
Inverclyde	5,948	437.3	13.6	6,018	458.3	13.1	6,032	466.6	12.9
Midlothian	5,403	398.2	13.6	5,361	404.2	13.3	5,357	401.4	13.3
Moray	5,664	462.5	12.2	5,664	482.3	11.7	5,648	470.8	12.0
North Ayrshire	9,183	686.3	13.4	9,283	691.2	13.4	9,331	704.8	13.2
North Lanarkshire	23,407	1,745.1	13.4	23,757	1,781.4	13.3	23,948	1,807.7	13.2
Orkney Islands	1,440	132.2	10.9	1,459	133.6	10.9	1,439	134.7	10.7
Perth and Kinross	7,627	608.9	12.5	7,497	612.8	12.2	7,405	611.8	12.1
Renfrewshire	11,824	865.9	13.7	11,764	886.4	13.3	11,767	889.3	13.2
Scottish Borders	6,454	535.2	12.1	6,436	528.0	12.2	6,413	538.0	11.9
Shetland Islands	1,626	200.8	8.1	1,681	197.6	8.5	1,764	204.1	8.6

Education authority secondary schools

Number of pupils, teachers (FTE) and pupil teacher ratio by authority[1]

	1996			1995			1994		
	Total secondary pupils	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/ teacher ratio*	*Total secondary pupils*	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/ teacher ratio*	*Total secondary pupils*	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/ teacher ratio*
South Ayrshire	7,994	587.6	13.6	7,983	594.3	13.4	7,829	586.6	13.3
South Lanarkshire	21,200	1,546.1	13.7	21,310	1,558.2	13.7	21,198	1,569.9	13.5
Stirling	5,623	424.2	13.3	5,688	434.4	13.1	5,633	442.0	12.7
West Dunbartonshire	6,813	488.4	13.9	6,760	510.1	13.3	6,766	520.7	13.0
West Lothian	9,997	739.8	13.5	9,920	760.5	13.0	9,963	758.3	13.1
Western Isles	2,113	222.8	9.5	2,145	226.0	9.5	2,249	228.8	9.8

[1] Due to rounding Scotland totals may not be the sum of constituent parts.

Number of pupils, teachers (FTE) and pupil teacher ratio by authority[1]

	1993			1992		
	Total secondary pupils	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/teacher ratio*	*Total secondary pupils*	*Teachers total FTE*	*Pupil/teacher ratio*
Scotland	312,001	24,481.4	12.7	303,689	24,227.4	12.5
Aberdeen City	10,844	864.4	12.5	10,578	886.8	11.9
Aberdeenshire	15,089	1,105.4	13.7	14,698	1,108.0	13.3
Angus	7,122	562.2	12.7	6,971	547.5	12.7
Argyll and Bute	5,623	459.9	12.2	5,515	458.3	12.0
Clackmannanshire	2,904	223.8	13.0	2,979	238.8	12.5
Dumfries and Galloway	9,430	782.6	12.0	9,156	783.2	11.7
Dundee City	8,716	736.3	11.8	8,499	723.3	11.8
East Ayrshire	7,665	588.1	13.0	7,840	626.4	12.5
East Dunbartonshire	8,585	628.8	13.7	8,439	614.7	13.7
East Lothian	4,606	359.2	12.8	4,507	350.5	12.9
East Renfrewshire	6,498	470.9	13.8	6,261	457.1	13.7
Edinburgh, City of	18,040	1,422.0	12.7	17,520	1,387.0	12.6
Falkirk	8,663	636.9	13.6	8,419	618.5	13.6
Fife	22,619	1,712.0	13.2	21,878	1,677.0	13.0
Glasgow City	29,274	2,449.1	12.0	28,790	2,458.8	11.7
Highland	15,028	1,248.5	12.0	14,550	1,242.6	11.7
Inverclyde	6,045	463.9	13.0	5,951	466.0	12.8
Midlothian	5,256	399.1	13.2	5,163	407.3	12.7
Moray	5,526	460.5	12.0	5,388	473.2	11.4
North Ayrshire	9,156	689.9	13.3	8,492	651.5	13.0
North Lanarkshire	23,731	1,799.5	13.2	23,024	1,734.9	13.3
Orkney Islands	1,448	134.5	10.8	1,412	134.8	10.5
Perth and Kinross	7,248	593.9	12.2	6,998	587.1	11.9
Renfrewshire	11,673	873.7	13.4	11,148	860.8	13.0
Scottish Borders	6,276	523.9	12.0	6,104	529.2	11.5
Shetland Islands	1,761	195.3	9.0	1,757	190.4	9.2
South Ayrshire	7,801	582.0	13.4	7,510	567.6	13.2
South Lanarkshire	20,965	1,551.6	13.5	20,213	1,500.9	13.5
Stirling	5,685	439.2	12.9	5,639	438.0	12.9
West Dunbartonshire	6,642	517.7	12.8	6,519	506.4	12.9
West Lothian	9,850	773.0	12.7	9,519	772.2	12.3
Western Isles	2,232	233.4	9.6	2,252	228.6	9.9

[1] Due to rounding Scotland totals may not be the sum of constituent parts.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to encourage the best school teachers to continue as classroom teachers. [20542]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* Successful classroom teachers who lead and inspire our young people should receive recognition and encouragement to continue in their role. Before bringing forward detailed plans, however, I wish to seek the views of interested parties on how that can best be achieved. I have therefore asked the Commission on Scottish Education jointly established by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the teacher unions to consider the issue. I expect a report in due course.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20530]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* My Department has dealings with a very large number of non-governmental organisations and suppliers of products and services. The Department is keeping the issue of the year 2000 compliance of its suppliers under review as part of its overall year 2000 work programme, in line with guidance provided by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA).

Undergraduate Courses

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is his policy to encourage Scottish universities to give applicants with advanced highers direct entry into the second year of undergraduate courses. [20544]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* It is for the higher education institutions themselves to decide whether to admit a student direct to the second year of a degree course on the basis of Advanced Higher passes. The Government are determined to ensure that the potential of the Advanced Higher in improving standards and the quality of the educational experience in the Scottish sixth year is realised and welcome the positive response of the higher education sector to the Higher Still Programme and to the Advanced Higher. The Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals have indicated that recognition for the Advanced Higher is likely to take a variety of forms.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time employees in his Department are paid at an hourly rate of between *(a)* £3.25 and £3.50, *(b)* £3.51 and £3.75 and *(c)* £3.76 and £4. [20614]

Mr. Dewar: Based on a net working week of 37 hours the information is *(a)* 1, *(b)* 226 and *(c)* 19. A pay offer is currently under consideration by staff in the Scottish Prison Service and if it is accepted the information will be *(a)* 0, *(b)* 226 and *(c)* 9.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom fishing vessels which currently regularly work in fisheries *(a)* one day or less, *(b)* two days and *(c)* three days or more sailing time from ports (i) in the north east of Scotland and (ii) on the west coast of Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [20650]

Mr. Dewar: Any reliable estimate would involve disproportionate costs.

Information is collected on the length of fishing trips and the location of fishing activity, but it would require detailed analysis to identify the patterns of such activity for the fleet for a representative period. Vessels may fish in a number of sea areas during a single fishing trip.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mixed-sex NHS wards there were in Scotland on *(a)* 1 November, *(b)* 1 May, *(c)* 1 November 1996 and *(d)* 1 November 1995. [20061]

Mr. Galbraith: As the information requested is not available centrally, I shall write to the hon. Member.

HEALTH

Hearing Aids

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much has been spent by the NHS Supplies Authority in the purchase of hearing aids in each of the last five years; [18362]

(2) how much was spent by the National Health Service in purchasing hearing aids from the NHS Supplies Authority in the last five years for which figures are available. [18363]

Mr. Boateng: The information is set out in the table.

Total buying-in and sales figures for hearing aids and accessories: last five years

Period	*Buying-in cost (£)*	*Sales (£)*	*Differences (per cent.)*
1992–93	18,053,000	18,701,000	3.46
1993–94	19,232,000	20,872,000	7.85
1994–95	18,385,000	21,010,000	12.49
1995–96	18,589,000	20,294,000	8.40
1996–97	18,799,000	21,513,000	12.61

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in East Lancashire aged under 60 years have Alzheimer's disease; and what percentage of this number is cared for at home. [19693]

Mr. Boateng: Unfortunately, it is not possible to give my hon. Friend precise information as this is not available. However, a best estimate based on a recent national epidemiological study indicates that the number of sufferers under the age of 60 in East Lancashire would be approximately 80. It is not known what percentage of this number is cared for at home. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the Chairman of East Lancashire Health Authority for further information.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many PFI schemes are currently under consideration; and what the total revenue commitment of the NHS is to these schemes; [19469]

(2) what his estimates are for *(a)* 1977–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* and (e) 2000–2001 onwards of total annual revenue commitments of the NHS at a consequence of all PFI schemes entered into to date. [19470]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The Government have prioritised 15 major Private Finance Initiative schemes. The schemes at Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust and Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust have already reached financial close and started construction. Information on the revenue consequences of PFI schemes with a capital value under £10 million is not collected centrally.

Details of the unitary charge payable to the private sector in the remaining 13 schemes are being negotiated and therefore commercially confidential until financial close is achieved. We estimate, however, the total revenue commitments on major PFI schemes at 2001–02 will represent less than 0.5 per cent. of revenue spend in the Hospital and Community Health Services.

The estimated unitary payments for the two schemes which have reached financial close are set out in the table.

Estimated annual unitary payment

£ million

	Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	*Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust*
2000–01	12.5	9.1
2001–02	16.6	10.9
2002–03	16.6	10.9
2003–04	16.6	10.9
2004–05	16.6	10.9
2005–06	16.6	10.9
2006–07	16.6	10.9
2007–08	16.6	10.9
2008–09	16.6	10.9
2009–10	16.6	10.9
2010–11	16.6	10.9
2011–12	16.6	10.9
2012–13	16.6	10.9
2013–14	16.6	10.9
2014–15	16.6	10.9
2015–16	16.6	10.9
2016–17	16.6	10.9
2017–18	16.6	10.9
2018–19	16.6	10.9
2019–20	16.6	10.9
2020–21	16.6	10.9
2021–22	16.6	10.9
2022–23	16.6	10.9
2023–24	16.6	10.9
2024–25	16.6	10.9
2025–26	4.1	10.9
2026–27	—	10.9
2027–28	—	10.9
2028–29	—	10.9
2029–30	—	10.9
2030–31	—	1.8
2031–32	—	
Total unitary payments	415	327

1. Figures in 1996 prices and are subject to indexation.

2. Payment for a PFI contract does not commence until the hospital is operational. Figures assume that both schemes become operational during 2000–01.

3. The figures assume full availability and performance standards are met throughout.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of revenue and capital charges will be required to service the current PFI projects with a capital value over £10 million. [19862]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* A Private Finance Initiative contract is for the provision of a fully serviced hospital facility. A National Health Service trust pays for the service by means of a single unitary payment. The unitary payment includes elements of cost for the provision and maintenance of assets, the supporting facilities management and financing. It is therefore, not appropriate to attempt to disaggregate the price charged for these services.

The annual unitary payments for the two major PFI schemes that have reached financial close are expected to be:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust: £16.6 million

Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust: £10.9 million.

Steak and Cigarettes (Health Risk)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health risk of *(a)* eating one T-bone steak per week and *(b)* smoking 20 cigarettes a day; and if he will make a statement. [20119]

Ms Jowell: The information is not available in the form requested.

Autism

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adults diagnosed as autistic when children are in institutions funded by his Department. [20257]

Mr. Boateng: No places are directly funded by the Department of Health and no information is held centrally on the number of adults with autism in institutions. Health and local authorities are responsible for the provision and development of appropriate services in their areas in the light of Departmental guidance. The Department has also funded a number of projects to raise awareness of the needs of people with autism and to help develop good practice.

Hospitals (Meat Supplies)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that all meat bought for hospitals originates in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [20245]

Ms Jowell: It is for individual National Health Service trusts to decide how they source their meat. About 80 per cent. of trusts in England use NHS Supplies Authority contracts. These do not specify country of origin. NHS Supplies' responsibility is to obtain best value for money for the NHS, while ensuring compliance with European public procurement directives.

Smoking

Mr. MacGregor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risk of dying from cancer as a result of smoking 10 cigarettes a day. [20473]

Ms Jowell: The assessment requested has not been made specifically for smoking related cancer deaths but the risk of an individual dying *in any one year* from smoking 10 cigarettes per day (all smoking related diseases) has been estimated as 1:200.

Incontinence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if incontinence care will be included in the first tranche of services to be covered by the national service frameworks announced in the White Paper, "The New NHS". [20561]

Mr. Boateng: The development of a range of recuperation and rehabilitation services for older people is likely to be included in the first tranche of services to be covered by the national service frameworks as announced in the White Paper, "The New NHS".

Incontinence services play a key role in that range of service provision.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Spelthorne dated 28 October concerning Mrs. M. Stanford of Sunbury on Thames. [20680]

Mr. Milburn: I have written to the hon. Member today.

Death Statistics

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the death rate from injuries or illnesses relating to *(a)* motor car accidents, *(b)* smoking, *(c)* alcohol and *(d)* eating BSE infected beef. [20393]

Ms Jowell: Information on death rates is not available in the form requested.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, following the changes set out in his White Paper, "The New NHS", NHS trusts will still be able to retain funds generated by the sale of assets for the sole use of the trust concerned. [20734]

Mr. Milburn: Under the existing arrangements National Health Service trusts retain the proceeds they generate from the sale of their assets. Whether the trust can spend the cash it has generated is subject to the discretion of the appropriate NHS executive regional office. If, in the view of the regional office, a trust which has generated cash does not have an appropriate use for the money it is allowed to keep the cash but cannot spend it until an appropriate requirement can be identified.

The trust financial regime will be reconsidered in the light of comments on the White Paper. Any changes made as a result will be to ensure that resources are deployed in the most equitable way to maximise benefit to the NHS.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will *(a)* list the national paybands for full-time staff in his Department which would represent an hourly rate of £4 or less and *(b)* list by region as defined by the regional government offices the numbers of staff paid at these rates. [20607]

Ms Jowell: The lowest national payband in the Department of Health ranges from £8,000 to £15,750 a year. Because of differences in hours of work, a rate of £4 per hour for London staff equates to an annual salary of £8,561; outside London the figure is £8,770.

	Number of staff
London	9
North East	0
Yorkshire and Humberside	42
East Midlands	12
Eastern	0
South East	3
South West	0
West Midlands	0
Merseyside	2
North West	76

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time staff in his Department are paid at an hourly rate of *(a)* £3.65, *(b)* between £3.66 and £3.75 and *(c)* between £3.76 and £4. [20608]

Ms Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 2 December at column *182*.

At present, the Department of Health employs 106 full-time members of staff who are being paid an hourly rate of £3.65. There are 15 members of staff who are paid between £3.66 and £3.75 an hour and 23 are paid between £3.76 and £4 an hour.

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how carers and care users will be able to ensure that they obtain the consistency and quality in the availability of services covered by national service frameworks announced in the White Paper, "The New NHS". [20562]

Mr. Boateng: Representatives of users and carers will be involved in the development of national service frameworks, which will be published documents. Health authorities, National Health Service trusts and Primary Care Groups will agree local health improvement programmes which will set out, among other things, how national service frameworks will be implemented locally. These will also be published documents.

In addition, the White Paper introduces two new national bodies. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will promote clinical and cost-effectiveness and produce and disseminate clinical guidelines. The Commission for Health Improvement will support and oversee the quality of clinical governance and clinical services.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his

Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19304]

Mr. Morley: The Department employs two special advisers. Details were set out in the answer given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *615–17*.

For information on the total paybill for special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

No task force members are employed by the Department.

There are currently two Reviews involving external members, none of whom are paid a salary by the Department. However, the Department does pay an attendance allowance for meetings attended and reimburses reasonable travel and subsistence costs.

It is not possible to distinguish the cost of officials' time spent on Task Force and Review related work.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed; and whether they receive remuneration. [19980]

Mr. Morley: Details of all Public Appointments made by my right hon. Friend during 1997 will be published in the 1998 Departmental Annual Report.

Beef

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the quality of the meat imported into the United Kingdom from *(a)* the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* France, *(d)* Botswana, *(e)* Namibia and *(f)* Australia; how the regulations applying to meat from these countries differ from those applying to British beef; and if he will make a statement. [20394]

Mr. Rooker: All fresh meat produced in the UK and imported into the UK from other EU Member States must be produced in accordance with harmonised Community rules laid down in Council Directive 64/433/EEC. Fresh meat imported from third countries must come only from approved establishments in countries which are authorised by the European Commission to export to the Community, which include Botswana, Namibia and Australia. These controls are designed to ensure that the meat satisfies health requirements equivalent to those applying within the Community.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the risk of BSE being contained in meat imported into the United Kingdom from *(a)* the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* France, *(d)* Botswana, *(e)* Namibia and *(f)* Australia; and if he will make a statement; [20396]

(2) what assessment he has made of the risk of contracting CJD from BSE contained in meat produced in *(a)* the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* France, *(d)* Botswana, *(e)* Namibia, *(f)* Australia and *(g)* the United Kingdom. [20395]

Mr. Rooker: BSE has never been detected in meat (muscle) even in clinically affected cattle.

It is not therefore possible to assess accurately the risk of contracting CJD from meat from any source.

SEAC have advised that the most likely source of nvCJD is exposure to BSE before 1989, when the measures to exclude BSE infected tissues from the human food chain were put in place. However, there is, as yet, no conclusive evidence of the route of infection or the infective dose. Nor is it possible to determine whether a single challenge can cause the disease or whether exposure over a period would be necessary to establish the disease.

Given that the incidence of BSE is higher in the UK than elsewhere, it is to be expected that the risk of exposure from offals has historically been greater than in other countries.

BSE has not been reported in Botswana, Namibia and Australia. We therefore consider that the risk of beef imported from those countries carrying BSE infectivity is very small indeed.

BSE has been reported in the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and France, but these countries, like the UK, have measures in place which exclude the most ineffective tissues (specified risk material) from the human food chain.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on British farmers of *(a)* the export ban on British beef and *(b)* the ban on the sale of meat on the bone. [20397]

Mr. Rooker: It is impossible to establish the direct impact on farmers of the export ban in isolation. The maintenance of the ban is only one of the factors currently contributing to the weakness of the domestic market. However, its impact will in part have been offset by the removal from the market of over 30 months cattle, calves under 20 days of age and beef bought into intervention.

Since only 5 per cent. of beef is currently sold on the bone, the effect on producer returns on the ban on the sale of bone-in beef should be negligible.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the risk to consumers of CJD infection from eating *(a)* 1kg of beef on the bone products and *(b)* 1kg of beef on the bone sourced from a Scottish beef herd. [20503]

Mr. Rooker: Much would depend on the product and which particular bone. If the hon. Member is referring to vertebral column and the risk from dorsal root ganglion, the risk is likely to be greater for products in which the dorsal root ganglion could remain in the food. That would be the case for bone-in beef or for products such as mechanically recovered meat. The use of vertebral column to produce mechanically recovered meat was prohibited in 1995. Another factor which needs to be taken into account is the particular product concerned.

Some products, such as gelatin, involve processes which are known to reduce the level of BSE infectivity and would therefore present a lower risk than other products.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the representations he has received since he announced the ban on the sale of beef on the bone products; and how many of these representations were in favour of *(a)* the issuing of a warning on the possible risk from beef on the bone products and *(b)* a ban on sales of such products. [20504]

Mr. Rooker: All replies received by 4pm on Friday 12 December, in response to the consultation exercise carried out with industry, consumers and interested parties on the bone-in beef proposals, have been carefully considered and assessed. The results of the consultation exercise have been reflected in the legislation which my right hon. Friend is intending to lay before the House today. As is our usual practice, copies of the responses will be deposited in the Library of the House.

Organophosphates

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences for the manufacture and sale of organophosphate-based products have been withdrawn; and for what reasons. [20584]

Mr. Rooker: Since 1986, when statutory controls on pesticides were introduced, the approvals of 80 MAFF-approved organophosphate-based pesticide products have been withdrawn for commercial reasons at the request of the company concerned; 11 organophosphate product approvals have been revoked for the failure of the approval-holding company to meet a "data submission deadline" set by Ministers for the company to provide information on the effectiveness (efficacy) of its product; five organophosphate product approvals have been revoked for the failure of an approval-holding company to meet a "data submission deadline" set by Ministers for a company to provide information on some aspect of the safety of its product, in order fully to support the product's new or continuing approval; nine organophosphate product approvals have been revoked for the failure of an approval-holding company to provide information required by Ministers (and supplied by other companies), following a UK review of the data package supporting the active ingredients; two organophosphate product approvals have been revoked following the lapsing of a provisional approval for a particular batch of a product which had been imported by a company into the UK.

No licences or marketing authorisations for organophosphate-based veterinary medicinal products have been withdrawn by the Licensing Authority. Products have been voluntarily withdrawn from the market by licence holders from time to time since the Medicines Act came into force in 1968. Details of the numbers are not readily available and the reasons for withdrawal were matters for the licence holders.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the permitted uses of the organophosphate product Chlorpyriphos; and what assessment of the results of the US Government's research into its carcinogenic properties was taken into account when authorising these uses. [20583]

Mr. Rooker: All pesticides are subject to strict regulatory control and must be approved by Ministers before they may be marketed or used in the United Kingdom. Chlorpyriphos, either by itself or in combination with other pesticide active ingredients, is approved for use in the UK as an insecticide on apples, barley, beetroot, currants, brassicas, carrots, celery, cereal grain, fennel, forestry, garlic, gooseberries, grassland, ornamental nursery stock, lettuce, leeks, maize, oats, oilseed rape, onions, parsnips, peas, pears, plums, potatoes, radishes, rhubarb, wheat, strawberries, sugar beet, sweetcorn and triticale. It is also approved for use as a fabric and machinery treatment in grain stores and as a public hygiene insecticide.

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides recently considered two US Government studies—a review of chlorpyriphos-associated cases of delayed neuropathy and a review of chlorpyriphos poisoning data—and recommended that although no action need be taken on present UK approvals for chlorpyriphos as a result of these they should be drawn to the attention of the Commission and Spain which is currently reviewing chlorpyriphos as part of the EC review programme. This has been done.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

4. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the reasons why pensioners do not claim income support. [19060]

Mr. Denham: The previous Administration took the view that the only explanation for non take up of benefit was choice by poor pensioners. This has meant that up to 1 million pensioners who are entitled to Income Support do not claim it. We are determined to get help to those pensioners. We have commissioned research to find out why they do not take up their benefit entitlement and from next April will run pilot exercises to establish how best to get help to them.

28. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners who are entitled to receive income support but do not claim it. [19085]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Around a million pensioners are not taking up their entitlement to Income Support, and we are determined to get help to them. We have commissioned research to find out why they do not make a claim, and from next April we will run a number of pilot exercises to find out how best to get help to them.

Pensions

10. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the availability of value for money pensions to those on low incomes. [19066]

Mr. Denham: Occupational schemes provide good quality second pensions for half of all employees, but personal pensions can be unsuitable for those on low incomes. As part of our pensions review we are consulting widely on how best to take forward our proposals for Stakeholder Pensioners to ensure that those without good quality occupational pension schemes have access to secure, flexible, value for money second pensions.

The consultation period for Stakeholder Pensions ends in January and we expect to publish our detailed proposals, alongside our proposals for the long-term framework for pensions, in the first half of next year.

22. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps she is taking to publicise the level of rebates available for those opting out of the state earnings-related pensions scheme under recent pension tax changes. [19078]

Mr. Denham: The National Insurance Rebates available to those who contract-out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme are contained in three rebate Orders which were laid before this House in April last year. These Orders are available to the public from HMSO.

The Contributions Agency issues to employers and insurance companies publications which give details of the contracting-out rebates.

Means-tested Benefits

14. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received on the impact of the current rate of inflation on the recipients of means-tested benefits. [19070]

Mr. Field: None.

25. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the impact on the social security budgets for means-tested benefits of the current rate of inflation. [19081]

Mr. Field: The uprating of benefits for 1998–99 was announced on 2 December and will ensure that the main rates of benefits are protected from inflation. The cost of protecting benefits from inflation for 1998–99 will be £2.45 billion.

Council Tax Benefits

23. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the impact of the proposed reduction in council tax benefit. [19079]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The proposal to limit Council Tax Benefit for properties in bands F, G and H to the maximum available for band E properties is one of a number of measures we inherited from the previous Administration. We have had to make a number of hard choices in order to honour our commitment to keep spending within the planned ceiling for Social Security expenditure. We have decided, therefore, to proceed with the measure.

Sixty-five thousand people will be affected. But we are continuing to fully subsidise more than 98 per cent. of Council Tax Benefit recipients who do not live in the most expensive properties.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money will be saved by the proposed restriction of council tax benefit for those living in properties of higher values in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland. [19065]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The estimated savings from the restriction of Council Tax Benefit for properties in council tax bands F, G and H to band E are £13½ million in England and Wales and £1½ million in Scotland for 1998–99.

Mortgage Interest Rates

24. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received on the application of standard interest rates on those with mortgages and claiming benefits. [19080]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have received 755 representations from hon. Members, members of the public and national organisations.

Benefits System

26. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to modernise the distribution mechanisms within the benefits system. [19082]

Mr. Field: Better service is central to our approach to Welfare Reform. Our vision for Active Modern Service is based around people. That means providing an integrated service that is focused on what customers need.

We have therefore asked the Benefits Agency to improve its distribution of publicity material about benefits to the public.

The Benefits Agency will simplify its programme of leaflets and other media, in order to provide better information and allow the customer easier access to the benefits system.

New leaflets will be designed with the customer as the main focus, not the system. The Benefits Agency will then put mechanisms in place to ensure consistent messages across all customer information.

These improvements will cover existing formats and all relevant aspects of electronic media.

The Benefits Agency has recently launched an expanded Website, providing information on benefits, new customer complaints procedure and local office details. The site receives over 12,000 visits a week.

State Pensions

27. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations she has received on the level of the basic state pension. [19083]

Mr. Denham: On 17 July, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced a review of the central areas of insecurity for elderly people, including all aspects of the basic pension and its value. Many of the more than 2,000 responses to the initial consultation exercise included representations on the level of the basic state pension. We will examine all the responses in the weeks and months to come. We will then publish our initial framework for change in the first half of 1998.

We recently announced that from next April the basic pension will rise to £103.40 a week for a couple and £64.70 for a single pensioner. This is in keeping with our manifesto commitment to uprate the basic pension at least in line with prices. It is in line with the 3.6 per cent. increase in prices in September which was higher than expected, and the cost will be greater than was included in the previous Government's spending plans.

Women's Issues

29. **Ann Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to open up a new dialogue with women. [19086]

Ms Ruddock: We are creating a new bond of trust between women and Government by opening up a new dialogue with women by improving and extending the way in which Government communicates with women's organisations and by looking at ways to conduct a dialogue with women who do not join organisations.

As part of this process, we are reviewing the role and status of the Women's National Commission. The terms of reference of this review is set out in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *602*.

30. **Lorna Fitzsimons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what contact she has had with women's organisations in Northern Ireland. [19087]

Ms Ruddock: The Ministers for Women represent the interests of all women, throughout the United Kingdom. On 2 December, I visited Northern Ireland to open the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition offices. I also visited the Northern Ireland Equal Opportunities Commission and met with women from the Northern Ireland Women's Forum, and other women's organisations. We have also had correspondence with the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation.

38. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to use women's juries to consult on policy priority. [19095]

Ms Ruddock: We seek to create a new bond of trust between women and Government which will enable us to keep in touch with what women want by opening up a new dialogue with women.

We are doing this by improving and extending the way in which Government communicates with women's organisations; and by looking at ways to conduct a dialogue with women who do not join organisations.

We are considering a range of options—including setting up women's juries—to ensure that our new dialogue will be a new, innovative and effective way of communicating with women everywhere.

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how she plans to ensure that Government Departments take full account of women's interests. [19069]

Ms Ruddock: We are taking steps to ensure that women's interests are placed at the very heart of government. This means integrating women's concerns and interests into the policy-making process of all Government Departments—a process often called "mainstreaming".

However, we believe that the guidance on "mainstreaming" drawn up by the previous Government should be strengthened. We are therefore working on revised guidance, which will be more accessible and user-friendly.

Once this guidance has been issued, we will be evaluating its effect on a regular basis to ensure that it is properly used. We aim to publish an annual report which will cover how each Department has taken this work forward.

Housing Benefit

31. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what policy proposals she has for reducing housing benefit payments in the case of inflated rent levels. [19088]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are already measures in place which restrict the amount of rent which can be used to calculate housing benefit entitlement. Generally, housing benefit will only meet average rents for tenants living in the private rented sector. However, we are looking at the interaction of housing and housing benefit as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in the benefits area relating to the Hendon constituency are in receipt of housing benefit; how many of these are in *(a)* private houses, *(b)* local authority housing and *(c)* housing association housing; and if he will indicate in respect of each category (i) the highest amount paid, (ii) the average figure, (iii) the median figure and (iv) the upper and lower quartile figures. [20817]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested as housing benefit information is not collected on a constituency basis. Such information as is available relates to the London Borough of Barnet and is set out in the table.

Caseloads and weekly average amounts of housing benefit for the London Borough of Barnet at the end of May 1997

	Local authority tenants	*Private tenants (excluding housing association tenants)*	*Housing association tenants*
Recipients	9,340	8,010	2,610
Average housing benefit	£47.78	£87.25	£77.46

Note:
Recipients may be a single person or a couple.
Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Disability Benefits

32. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of people of working age currently receiving disability benefits she plans to assist to move from welfare to work. [19089]

Mr. Denham: The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Up to £195 million, set aside from the Windfall Tax, will be used to finance a range of options aimed at helping people on disability benefits, in the most effective way possible, to move into or stay in work. As a first stage we are this week initiating the bidding process under which we will fund a number of innovative schemes. We also plan to introduce personal advisers to help people with a disability or long-term illness to overcome barriers to work, initially on a modest scale. These initiatives will inform decisions about how best to offer help to all those who need it.

36. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on welfare reform for disability benefits. [19093]

37. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the provision of state benefits for disabled people. [19094]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 8 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *451–52*.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to investigate the extent of and reasons for the underclaiming of disability benefits amongst disabled people *(a)* in general and *(b)* by each main type of disability. [20705]

Mr. Denham: The information is not yet available. We are using the disability follow-up to the 1996–97 Family Resources Survey to measure the take up of disability benefits. The analysis will include investigation of the characteristics of recipients and entitled non-recipients as far as sample sizes allow. Results will be published towards the end of 1998.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is her policy on disability benefits. [19084]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to modernising the Social Security system so that it helps people to work as far as they are able; provides appropriate support to those who cannot work; and makes the most effective use of the resources available.

Child Care

33. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received from women's groups on the child care provisions announced in the pre-Budget statement. [19090]

Ms Ruddock: In his pre-Budget statement, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a £300 million package of investment in child care provision over the next five years. This announcement was widely welcomed by women's groups and voluntary organisations.

Key players in child care provision—including women's groups—will be invited to a conference on the National Child care Strategy, hosted jointly by the Secretaries of State for Social Security and for Education and Employment, in January.

Pensions Rights (Divorced People)

34. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals she has to enable men and women to share pension rights on divorce. [19091]

Mr. Denham: Pension sharing recognises the contribution that both women and men make to a marriage. The Government are committed to introducing pension sharing for divorcing couples and we aim to do so from April 2000. We are working through the detailed issues and implementation arrangements with a panel of representatives of the pensions industry, family lawyers and others, and plan to publish a draft Bill for consultation. This is an important first step in our programme of modernising the pension system to improve the income of women in retirement.

Lone Parents

35. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received on her proposals in respect of lone parent benefits. [19092]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Representations about the proposed changes to lone parent benefits were made by a wide variety of organisations to the Social Security Advisory Committee. These representations were reflected in the Social Security Advisory Committee's report, which was published on 30 July together with the Government's response as Command Paper 3713. Similar points have been raised in correspondence from hon. Members and members of the public. There were parliamentary debates on the family premium regulations on 4 November and 12 November and the change to Child Benefit was debated during the Committee Stages of the Social Security Bill on 18 November and at Report and Third Reading on 10 December. A record of these debates has been published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on her proposals to help lone parents. [19073]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government's New Deal for Lone Parents is already operating in eight areas of the country, providing a personalised back-to-work service for lone parents.

My right hon. Friend The Chancellor announced on 26 November that from next April the New Deal for Lone Parents will be made available to all lone parents who make a new claim for Income Support. The New Deal will be available to all lone parents from October next year, at a cost of £175 million over the course of this Parliament. This included an additional £25 million, also announced by the Chancellor, to enable the service to be offered to those lone parents with a child under five who want to work.

In addition, we announced a £300 million initiative to extend out-of-school child care provision to every community.

Family Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the relationship between family credit and the proposed working family tax credit. [19075]

Mr. Field: The Government are proposing a new working families' tax credit with cash paid directly through the wage packet to families on low income. The tax credit will build on the success of family credit and will help ensure that work pays for families with children.

The precise form of the working family tax credit has yet to be decided.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in receipt of family credit have total earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions; and how many of these are *(a)* women and *(b)* lone parents. [20806]

Mr. Keith Bradley: At 31 May 1997 there were 175,000 recipients of Family Credit with earnings below the lower earnings limit. Of these 112,000 were female (main earners), and 88,000 were lone parents.

Notes:

1. Information on the gender of Family Credit claimants is not available, the figure quoted is based on the gender of the main earner.

2. Sample size 5 per cent. of all awards.

3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:

Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, May 1997.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the percentage of claimants of *(a)* SSP and *(b)* the lower rate of short-term incapacity benefit who go on to receive (i) the higher rate of short-term incapacity benefit and (ii) long-term incapacity benefit. [20811]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available on the proportion of total SSP recipients who subsequently move onto the short-term higher rate of incapacity benefit and then long-term incapacity benefit. Around 35 per cent. of short-term lower rate cases move onto the short-term higher rate and around 15 per cent. subsequently move onto the long-term rate[1].

Source:

1. DSS 1 per cent. sample of recipients in Great Britain.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if the seminars recently organised at Baroness Hollis's request covering the possibility of taxing or means-testing disability benefits or substituting services are part of her Department's formal consultation on changes to benefit entitlement for disabled people; [17034]

(2) if she will publish a Green Paper setting out the Government's proposals and options for reform of disability benefits before making any significant changes to them. [17036]

Mr. Denham: I understand that my noble Friend, Baroness Hollis of Heigham, has recently attended seminars, covering a wide range of disability issues at the invitation of, and arranged by MENCAP, on behalf of various groups representing disabled people and their carers. These seminars were proposed by disability organisations so that they could present their views on disability benefits. My noble Friend found them helpful and informative.

We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the Department's expenditure as a first stage in our plan to modernise the Social Security system. The review is wide-ranging and includes the complex range of benefits paid to people who have health problems or who are disabled. No decisions on any options for change have been reached and no changes will be made before we have consulted people with disabilities and their organisations. We have regularly met organisations representing people with disabilities or health problems. These meetings have helped inform debate on what they see as the problems inherent in the current system, on how resources could be used more effectively, and on the development of our proposals for Welfare to Work for sick and disabled people. We continue to welcome the views of sick and disabled people, their representative organisations and others with an interest.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *204*, how many full-time employees are paid at the lowest hourly rates listed, in each of the regions defined by the regional government offices. [20654]

Mr. Field: The information is not readily available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Economic planning region	*Number of full-time employees on the lowest hourly rate*
Scotland	132
Northern	24
Yorkshire and Humberside	45
North West	252
East Midlands	36
West Midlands	47
Wales	24
East Anglia	18
South East	49
South West	50
Northern Ireland	1
Overseas	1

1. Figures include all staff on payroll as at 30 September 1997 in their current substantive grade.

Widows' Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of applications for widows' benefits are refused on the grounds of an insufficient contribution record. [20810]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available. However, it is estimated that 40,000 widows aged under 60 do not receive any Widows' Benefits, 15 per cent. of the total.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1995–96.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and 1 per cent.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are in receipt of reduced

earnings allowance in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the benefit office area serving the Wansbeck constituency and *(c)* average benefit office areas of equivalent size. [19246]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Reduced Earnings Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Denis Murphy, dated 12 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people are in receipt of Reduced Earnings Allowance (REA) in (a) the United Kingdom, (b) the benefit office area serving the Wansbeck constituency and (c) average benefit office areas of equivalent size.

The information is not available in the format requested. REA statistics are available for the Benefits Agency Northumbria District, which includes the offices at Ashington, Berwick, Blyth, Hexham, North Shields and Wallsend, and for Great Britain.

As at 31 March 1996, the number of customers in receipt of REA in the Northumbria District is estimated at 1,078. In Great Britain it is estimated at 150,590. The figures are based on a ten per cent sample of all REA assessments.

Figures on average benefit office areas of equivalent size to the Wansbeck constituency are not available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of claimants of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness benefit and *(c)* maternity allowance received the standard rate, three quarter rate and the half rate of benefit, broken down by gender, in the last full year for which statistics are available. [20807]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

	Men			*Women*			*Total*
	Full time	*.75 rate*	*.50 rate*	*Full rate*	*.75 rate*	*.50 rate*	*recipients*
Unemployment benefit[1] recipients at 31 May 1986	548,000	21,000	11,000	320,000	16,000	11,000	927,000
Percentage of recipients	59	2	1	35	2	1	—
Sickness benefit recipients at 31 March 1986	122,000	3,000	2,000	43,000	2,000	1,000	173,000
Percentage of recipients	70	2	1	25	2	1	—
Maternity allowance[2]	—	—	—	319,000	17,000	14,000	349,000
Percentage of awards	—	—	—	91	5	4	—

Notes:

1. Full rate unemployment benefit recipient figures included 5,000 cases where the rate of benefit is not known.
2. Relates to the number of awards of maternity allowance in the 12 months ending 31 March 1986.

Source:

DSS sample of recipients in Great Britain; Unemployment Benefit 5 per cent sample, Sickness Benefit 1 per cent sample, Maternity Allowance 2 per cent. sample.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 December 1997

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Royal Opera House

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he expects Sir Richard Eyre's review of the funding of the Royal Opera House to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [20930]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have asked Sir Richard Eyre and his group to report to me by 1 May 1998.

Excellence in Sport

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for fostering excellence in sport; and if he will make a statement. [21586]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have today announced that Sheffield will be the headquarters of the New United Kingdom Sport Institute (UKSI).

The joint decision taken by Ministers and the United Kingdom Sports Council (UKSC) is an historic moment for sport. I believe it will provide our very best sporting talent with the facilities and backup to help them challenge and beat the rest of the world. Sheffield will be the heart of a network—setting the standards and giving leadership to the nationwide network of facilities.

We have decided to locate the headquarters site at Sheffield because the bid: offered an extremely cohesive site with good transport and infrastructure; had responded particularly well to the vision and strategy set out by the Government and UKSC on the framework for the network; and builds on the existing public investment in sports facilities in Sheffield.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to allow hon. Members to challenge a refusal by a Minister to provide the information requested by means of a written parliamentary question. [21168]

Dr. David Clark: Ministers are committed to answering parliamentary questions in accordance with the Resolution of the House of 19 March 1997. If a Member believes that he or she has not received a satisfactory answer to a question, it is open to him or her to challenge the relevant Minister on those grounds.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the powers of Ministers to refuse to provide information requested in response to written parliamentary questions will be curtailed by the proposals included in the White Paper on Freedom of Information. [21167]

Dr. David Clark: Ministers are required by the House to answer parliamentary questions in accordance with the Resolution of 19 March 1997. This states:

> "Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest, which should be decided in accordance with relevant statute and the Government's *Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Second Edition, January 1997)*".

At such time as a Freedom of Information Act comes into force, the House will no doubt wish to consider amending the reference in that Resolution to the Code of Practice accordingly.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if information relating to the Sovereign and her family in respect of their public roles will be available to the public under the proposals set out in the White Paper on Freedom of Information; and if he will make a statement. [21194]

Dr. David Clark: Such information, where it is held by Government Departments, would be within the scope of the proposed Freedom of Information Act. Whether the information can be disclosed in particular cases will depend on whether it passes the harm and public interest tests integral to the Act's access provisions.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how long the consultation period in respect of the White Paper on Freedom of Information will last; and what target date he has for the introduction of a Bill to give effect to its provisions. [21142]

Dr. David Clark: Comments and views on the proposals in the White Paper "Your Right to Know" (Cm 3818) are invited by 28 February 1998. Later in the year we will publish a draft Bill, also for consultation. In the light of comments received about this, a Bill will be introduced to the House as soon as the legislative programme permits.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will carry out an assessment to establish whether the test of substantial harm in the White Paper on Freedom of Information could obviate the need for the blanket exemption proposed for the security services. [21169]

Dr. David Clark: This issue was considered in developing the proposals set out in the White Paper. The reasons why an exclusion from the Act was considered necessary for the Security and Intelligence Services are explained in paragraph 2.3.

Appointments

Kali Mountford: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many non-departmental public bodies were in existence on 1 April; what percentage of appointments to these bodies were *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities; and when the annual list of such bodies will be published. [21504]

Dr. David Clark: These figures are set out in the Cabinet Office (OPS) booklet "Public Bodies 1997", which is published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. On 1 April 1997 there were 1,128 non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in existence. As of 1 September 1997, 32 per cent. of the appointments to bodies listed in "Public Bodies" were held by women, an increase of 1 per cent. over the previous year; and 3.6 per cent. were held by members of the ethnic minorities, an increase of 0.3 per cent. over the previous year.

This Government are determined to keep the number of NDPBs to a minimum and Ministers are taking a personal look at the need for each NDPB they sponsor. The Government are also taking action to increase the number of women and members of ethnic minorities represented on the boards of such bodies.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what estimate he has made of the likely effect of the Millennium Experience in displacing visitors from other London attractions during 2000. [18618]

Mr. Mandelson: The British Tourist Authority predicts that the Millennium Experience will add considerable value to the tourism product offered by this country, estimating that visitors will on average extend their stay in Britain by more than a day in order to take in the Experience. Existing London attractions should regard the Millennium Experience not as a threat, therefore, but as an opportunity to attract more visitors themselves.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he and the Prime Minister were present throughout each session of the IGC at Amsterdam. [20474]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister were present at each session of the IGC at Amsterdam. Inevitably one or other had to leave the room from time to time, but at no time were both absent.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the status of the Falkland Islands is being considered as part of the Dependent Territories Review. [21202]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The review of the Dependent Territories covers generic issues (such as nomenclature and constitutional status) relevant to all remaining DTs, including the Falkland Islands. Given the special factors which apply to the Falklands no individual review of their status is being carried out.

We are committed to upholding the right of the Falkland Islanders to remain British. We have no doubts about British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and do not regard that sovereignty as negotiable.

Export Forum

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *596*, on the DTI/FCO Export Forum, if he will make a statement on his plans to help United Kingdom companies export their goods abroad. [21293]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department will continue to give the highest importance to helping British business perform to its full potential in overseas markets. Our response to some Export Forum recommendations will need to await the completion of the DTI/FCO Comprehensive Spending Review.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Court of Justice Case C-409/95

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General if he will place in the Library the written observations drafted on behalf of the UK Government and submitted to the European Court of Justice in case C-409/95 between Helmut Marschall and Land NordRhein-Westfalen. [20290]

The Attorney-General: It is not the practice of the Government to release copies of pleadings in cases before the European Court of Justice. Such pleadings are addressed to the Court and are prepared with the specific purpose of informing the Court and the other parties of the arguments of the party submitting the pleadings. The practice is in accordance with the exclusion in paragraph 4(e) of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (information relating to legal proceedings).

WALES

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact of his proposed reforms of non-departmental public bodies and agencies on the economy in Wales. [19383]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Government of Wales Bill provides for the merger of the Welsh Development Agency, the Land Authority for Wales and the Development Board for Rural Wales. This will achieve the Government's objective of reducing the number of unaccountable public bodies in Wales, and will provide for more efficient and effective economic development services across the whole of Wales.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many whole-time equivalent publicly funded officials were employed by non-departmental public

bodies in May; and what estimate he has made of the number to be so employed by 2000. [20125]

Mr. Ron Davies: As at May 1997, there were 2,169 full-time equivalent staff employed in executive NDPBs in Wales. Before the National Assembly for Wales is established in May 1999 the Government will take action to reduce the number of executive bodies in Wales from 19 to 14 and, thereafter, the assembly will be able to reduce further their number. This is likely to result in a reduction in the number of staff employed, but it is not possible at this time to estimate precisely what the actual numbers will be in 2000, as that depends on decisions yet to be taken.

Civil Servants

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many whole-time equivalent civil servants were employed in his Department in May 1997; and what estimate he has made of the number who will be so employed in 2000. [20102]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department employed some 2,300 whole-time equivalent civil servants in May 1997. Staffing levels for the year 2000 will be determined by the National Assembly for Wales.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the members of the Conservative Party whom he consulted prior to selecting a Conservative representative to sit on the Assembly advisory board; [20132]

(2) if he will list the representatives of the *(a)* Liberal Democrats and *(b)* Plaid Cymru whom he consulted prior to making appointments to the Assembly advisory board. [20139]

Mr. Ron Davies: I consulted a wide range of interests before deciding on the membership of the Welsh Assembly Advisory Group. These consultations were confidential, and will remain so.

Private Office

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the operational costs of running his private office in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and what estimate he has made of the costs in (i) 1997–98 (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000. [20098]

Mr. Ron Davies: Costs vary with levels of Ministerial activity and time spent between London and Cardiff. The cost of Ministerial private offices in the Welsh Office was £724,230 in 1995–96 and £720,625 in 1996–97.

Some £483,000 has been expended in 1997–98 to the end of November. The cost for the remainder of the year will reflect the nature and scale of Ministerial commitments.

Budgets for 1998–99 have yet to be determined. For 1999–2000 budgets will take account of the role of the Secretary of State following the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales.

Second Homes

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce the outcome of the consultation on second home council tax discounts in Wales. [21502]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend proposes to make regulations to widen the scope of Welsh local authorities' discretion to charge up to the full council tax on second homes. The regulations will have effect in relation to council taxes for 1 April 1988 onwards.

For a dwelling to fall within one of the new prescribed classes it will not be necessary for it to have previously been a sole or main residence. Nor will it be necessary for the dwelling to have been unused as a sole or main residence for the immediately preceding six months.

We propose to prescribe two classes in the regulations. One class will relate to dwellings with a restriction on occupancy by law which prohibits their use for a period of at least 28 days in any 12-month period. The other class will relate to dwellings which have no such restriction on occupancy.

These changes will allow local authorities the discretion to charge owners of dwellings in both classes up to the full council tax, or to decide on different treatment for homes which have the occupancy restriction and those which have no such restriction.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum and Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will estimate the time it will take his Department to complete work on applications made in December 1997 for *(a)* one year's leave to remain on the grounds of marriage, *(b)* settlement after having one year's stay on the grounds of marriage, *(c)* leave to remain as a student, *(d)* permission to stay under the provisions of the EU law and *(e)* asylum; [19026]

(2) what was the average time his Department took to deal with applications for *(a)* one year's leave to remain on the grounds of marriage, *(b)* settlement after having one year's stay on the grounds of marriage, *(c)* leave to remain as a student, *(d)* permission to stay under EU law and *(e)* asylum made in (i) November 1995, (ii) April 1996, (iii) November 1996 and (iv) April 1997. [19025]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: For applications on the basis of marriage, as a student or for asylum which have been decided, the available information is given in table 1. Data are not available in the same form for residence permits or residence documents issued. The percentages of applications decided within 1 month, 2 months or 6 months of receipt are given in table 2.

Data are also given for the latest available date. We expect to deal with most new marriage, student, and asylum applications made in December 1997 in shorter time scales than those shown for September or October 1997.

Table 1: Average time between application and decision, in months

Application type	Month of decision				
	November 1995	April 1996	November 1996	April 1997	October 1997
One year's leave to remain after marriage	5.9	7.2	6.7	8.0	7.3
Settlement one year after marriage	2.5	2.2	2.2	2.6	3.1
Leave to remain as a student	2.1	3.8	3.0	4.3	3.1
Asylum:					
Pre-1993 Act cases	40.3	43.7	47.8	53.2	58.2
Post 1993 Act cases	9.7	11.1	12.6	13.7	13.8

Table 2: Percentage of residence permits and residence documents issued

Per cent.

	Month of decision				
	November 1995	April 1996	November 1996	April 1997	September 1997[1]
Residence permits					
within 1 month	37	45	56	33	11
within 2 months	70	69	82	63	35
within 6 months	96	92	96	88	67
Residence documents					
within 1 month	23	22	22	16	6
within 2 months	40	51	41	40	19
within 6 months	84	73	74	64	43

[1] The reduction in the percentage of permits and documents issued within these timescales compared with earlier returns reflects the fact that resources have been targeted at deciding older applications.

Police (Riot Training)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the plastic baton round training referred to in the Minister of State's letter of 18 August to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley was provided *(a)* by the Royal Ulster Constabulary or *(b)* for the Royal Ulster Constabulary; [20029]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers are permitted to use firearms against unarmed demonstrators; [20048]

(3) if Surrey Police Force has taken the actions referred to in his letter to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley of 18 August concerning the Otec Ultima system; [20045]

(4) which United Kingdom police forces use the Otec Ultima training programme; [20042]

(5) if he will make it his policy to ensure that United Kingdom police forces using the Otec Ultima trainer observe the principle of minimum force; [20043]

(6) which foreign military, security or police forces have been supplied with the Otec Ultima Multi Media Weapons trainer; and if the training package included the video sequence displaying police using firearms on unarmed demonstrators; [20044]

(7) if police baton gunners trained on the Otec Ultima system have been retrained in accordance with his Department's guidelines on the discharge of plastic baton rounds on unarmed demonstrators. [20046]

Mr. Michael: I do not know which foreign military, security or police forces have been supplied with the Otec Ultima Multi Media Weapons training system but I understand that a marketing video for the system, which included a scene of a police officer firing a gun at rioters in a training simulation, was sent abroad by a British company. The scene was entirely inappropriate and, as I explained to my hon. Friend on 18 August, it has been dropped from the current marketing video. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the scene to my attention. The training system is used by the City of London, Metropolitan and Surrey police forces. None of these forces uses the system for baton round training. The training referred to in my letter of 18 August concerned an invitation to tender for the provision of a simulator to help in the training by the Royal Ulster Constabulary of its baton round gunners. That letter did not call upon Surrey police to take any action.

The Home Office has not discussed with the Association of Chief Police Officers circumstances in which officers would be permitted to use firearms against unarmed demonstrators because, as I said in my answer on 12 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *512*, it would be entirely wrong for police forces to train officers to fire on unarmed demonstrators. All officers trained in the use of plastic baton round launchers have been trained in accordance with Home Office guidelines on the use of baton rounds for dealing with public disorder. Any officer using force must comply with section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 which provides that a person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in preventing crime or arresting an offender. I would expect chief officers to ensure that this is fully reflected in any training of officers.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers concerning his Department's guidelines on the discharge of plastic baton rounds against unarmed demonstrators. [20047]

Mr. Michael: The Association of Chief Police Officers was consulted about Home Office guidelines on the use of baton rounds for dealing with public disorder when they were first issued in 1981 and during subsequent

revisions, the most recent of which was in 1995. A copy of the guidelines is in the Library. I am aware that the Association of Chief Police Officers have been considering whether, in their view, any amendments to the guidelines should be made; but no proposals have been put forward and no recent discussions on this subject have taken place with the Home Office.

Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks are made, and by whom, on the quality and the variation of food served to people being held in the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre. [20619]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Harmondsworth Detention Centre is managed under contract to the Home Office by Group 4 Total Security Ltd., and meals are prepared for detainees by contract caterers.

The Area catering advisor of the Prison Service Catering Services is contracted to visit the centre regularly in order to survey the consumer dietary preferences, to review the menu cycle, and to examine the food budget balance. The contract caterers respond to comments from the adviser and monitor the "take up" rate of the menus offered, so as to be able to amend the meals and menus appropriately.

The centre is also regularly inspected for food hygiene by the Environmental Health Officer of the London Borough of Hillingdon in accordance with the Food Safety Act 1990.

Group 4's local managers check daily that meals prepared are within the "use by" date, and also sample the meals on a random basis and in response to any complaints. Meals are also regularly sampled by members of the Harmondsworth Visiting Committee, an independent body appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor the care and treatment of detainees. Immigration Service staff also occasionally sample meals.

Youth Justice

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that the responses to the consultation papers on Youth Justice and Community Safety Orders are published before the Crime and Disorder Bill receives its Second Reading. [20372]

Mr. Michael: Summaries of the responses to the consultation papers "Tackling Youth Crime". "New National and Local Focus on Youth Crime" and "Tackling Delays in the Youth Justice System" were placed in the Library on 15 December 1997. A summary of the responses to the consultation paper "Community Safety Order" has been placed in the Library today.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time employees are paid at the rate of £3.84 an hour in his Department. [20605]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Forty-seven, out of a total of 48,192 full-time employees.

General Elections

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics his Department collates on expenditure of candidates in general elections. [21503]

Mr. Straw: The total expenses of candidates in general elections between 1857 and 1992 are set out in the tables below. Table 1 shows the actual expenditure. Table 2 has the figures indexed to 1992 prices.

The figures for the 1997 general election are not yet available.

Table 1: General elections, 1857 to 1992 total expenses of candidates

£ million

Year	Expense	Year	Expense
1857	0.43	1929	1.21
1859	0.40	1931	0.65
1865	0.71	1935	0.72
1868	1.29	1945	1.07
1874	1.02	1950	1.17
1880	1.62	1951	0.95
1885	0.79	1955	0.90
1886	0.49	1959	1.05
1892	0.76	1964	1.23
1895	0.62	1966	1.14
1900	0.63	1970	1.47
1906	0.96	1974 February	2.10
1910 January	1.07	1974 October	2.26
1910 December	0.79	1979	3.69
1918	—	1983	6.31
1922	1.02	1987	8.31
1923	0.98	1992	10.78
1924	0.92		

Notes:
Figures are not available for the 1918 election.
Includes personal expenses.

Table 2: General elections expenditure at 1992 prices 1857–1992

£ million

Year	Expenditure	Year	Expenditure
1857	26.51	1929	38.30
1859	25.09	1931	21.32
1865	39.72	1935	24.73
1868	72.97	1945	22.57
1874	53.20	1950	19.91
1880	93.96	1951	14.75
1885	49.18	1955	12.01
1886	30.45	1959	11.88
1892	47.10	1964	12.16
1895	39.16	1966	10.39
1900	35.87	1970	11.31
1906	56.00	1974 February	10.49
1910 January	61.48	1974 October	11.32
1910 December	45.52	1979	8.89
1918	—	1983	10.32
1922	27.23	1987	11.35
1923	29.08	1992	10.78
1924	27.79		

Notes:
Figures are not available for the 1918 election.
Includes personal expenses.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the payment of grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 to provide additional support for ethnic minorities. [21487]

Mr. Straw: We fully recognise the value of work which section 11 grant has supported and the importance that local authorities and communities attach to this. We have commissioned a study to consider how such support needed for members of ethnic minorities can best be provided. The exercise is being conducted by my Department in collaboration with the Department for Education and Employment. I very much hope that local authorities and other interested parties will contribute views. The findings of the study, which are expected to be available in the spring, will inform our further consideration.

Immigration Detainees (Minors)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) where the legal responsibility for unaccompanied minors detained in immigration detention centres rests; [20655]

(2) whether the protection and care of unaccompanied minors in Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre is the responsibility of the Oxfordshire Child Protection Committee. [20657]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is our policy not to detain unaccompanied minors save only in very exceptional circumstances. Normal procedure is to grant temporary admission wherever possible, either into the care of a close relative or friend, or into the care of social services. In the few instances where detention is considered essential, accommodation appropriate to the age of the detainee is provided and a member of staff is appointed to act as a chaperon as necessary.

Legal responsibility for unaccompanied minors detained in immigration detention centres rests with the Home Office. Any assistance offered by the Oxfordshire Child Protection Committee would always be given consideration.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the arrangements to secure the accountability of, and to monitor the actions of, private security personnel working in immigration detention centres, with particular reference to the custody and care of unaccompanied minors. [20659]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The performance of private sector security companies employed under contract to manage and operate immigration detention centres is monitored by on-site Immigration Service staff and, where appropriate, by specialist Home Office personnel. In addition, Immigration Service staff based at Immigration Service Headquarters are involved in the quality assurance process and hold regular review meetings with senior management from Group 4 Total Security Ltd., and Wackenhut United Kingdom Ltd., in order to ensure that the highest standards are maintained and that all contractual obligations are met.

It is not normal policy or practice to detain unaccompanied minors and these are held only in the most exceptional of circumstances. All private sector companies involved in immigration detention are aware of the special significance of their duty of care in the case of unaccompanied minors.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what separate accommodation is provided for unaccompanied minors detained in immigration detention centres. [20656]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our normal policy is not to detain unaccompanied minors, and no accommodation is specifically set aside for their use in immigration detention centres. When it is necessary to detain an unaccompanied minor, a single room is provided in a discrete part of the detention centre used for those in need of close care or support.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied minors have been detained in Campsfield House, Oxfordshire, in each month of 1997 *(a)* under Immigration Act powers and *(b)* under other legislation. [20658]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Many of those who are liable to detention under powers conferred by the Immigration Act 1971, and who may at some stage have sought asylum in the United Kingdom, are not in possession of documents satisfactorily establishing either their identity or nationality. Some hold identity documents but claim to be younger than the ages shown therein. It is perhaps inevitable in these circumstances that there will be some cases where the precise age of the individual is in dispute.

During 1997, 12 persons claimed to be under 18 years of age while detained at Campsfield House. Information on when those persons first entered detention, under Immigration Act powers, at Campsfield House is given in the table. None of those persons were detained at Campsfield House as at 10 December 1997.

Age assessment remains an inexact science and definitive assessments cannot be made. The Immigration Service liaises closely with the Refugee Council's Panel of Advisers for Refugee Children. All cases where there is a dispute as to the age of an applicant are referred to the Panel.

While there is no minimum age below which a person may not be detained under powers conferred by the Immigration Act, under current guidelines detention is not usually considered appropriate for unaccompanied children or for persons under the age of 18. It is normal practice to grant temporary admission to those who are clearly unaccompanied minors, usually into the care of social services.

Month first detained at Campsfield House of persons alleged to have been aged under 18 years when detained there during 1997[1]

Month	*Number of persons*
January	[2]—
March	[2]—
May	4
June	[2]—
July	[2]—
October	[2]—
Total	12

[1] Those persons were detained solely under Immigration Act 1971 powers.

[2] Signifies one or two persons. Numbers are not given because individuals, whose records are confidential, could then be identified.

Prisoners (Telephone Calls)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on prison policy and rules relating to the *(a)* issue of and *(b)* payment for telephone cards and access to and use of prison telephones for contact with close relatives outside the jurisdiction; and how many minutes and how many calls are permitted each week for prisoners who are (i) on remand and (ii) on trial. [20337]

Ms Quin: In accordance with the rules and policy set out in Prison Service Standing Order 5 and Circular Instructions 61/1989 and 21/1992 (copies of which are in the Library) governing prisoner access and use of cardphones, prisoners may purchase from the prison shop phonecards using their earnings or private cash. Foreign nationals with close family ties abroad are exempted from the limits on access to private cash which apply under the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme.

Current policy on conditions of use allow all prisoners to have free access to a cardphone during association hours and at such other times as is reasonably practicable. Cardphones should normally be available for use of a period of not less than two hours a day. However, governors have discretion to impose time limits or a booking system for each prisoner if this is necessary to ensure equitable access to cardphones in their establishment.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many family telephone calls and of what duration Brian McHugh was permitted to make in *(a)* September, *(b)* October and *(c)* November 1997. [20332]

Ms Quin: Mr. McHugh made 34 calls in September 1997; 28 calls in October 1997; and 30 calls in November 1997. All the calls made were to members of Mr. McHugh's family. The length of Mr. McHugh's calls varied from three to 20 minutes.

The standard procedures concerning the use of telephones by high risk prisoners at Belmarsh Prison do not set an upper limit on the duration of any telephone call. Prisoners cannot, however, make calls when their phonecards have expired or when the call would prevent another prisoner's pre-booked telephone call taking place.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what submissions he has received from *(a)* the legal representatives of Roisin McAliskey and *(b)* others concerning her proposed extradition; and if he will make a statement. [20284]

Mr. Straw: Roisin McAliskey's solicitors submitted formal representations on 28 November 1997 asking me, exceptionally, either to reconsider the authority to proceed issued on 2 January 1997 or to take a final decision on surrender under section 12 of the Extradition Act 1989 before a decision is reached in the committal proceedings.

The Divisional Court ruled in 1994 that the Secretary of State does not have the power to reconsider an order to proceed (which would extend to an authority to proceed), once issued. Nor does section 12 of the Extradition Act 1989 allow me to take a decision, either to order return or, on the basis of my discretion contained in that section, to decide not to order return, until a decision on committal is taken by the magistrate.

I have agreed, without prejudice to a final decision by the courts on committal or my own on surrender, to start considering the representations put before me.

In respect of submissions from others, since Roisin McAliskey was arrested for the purposes of extradition on 26 November 1996, 7 Parliamentary Questions have been tabled: 16 letters from right hon. and hon. Members and 162 letters from members of the public have been received. One letter was handed in to the Home Office during a demonstration on 20 November and approximately 85 messages have been received via the Internet.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. NcNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the principal purposes of the draft Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons approved by the European Committee on Crime Problems in June 1997 and indicate the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the draft. [20286]

Mr. Michael: The Additional Protocol was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in September and will be opened for signature on 18 December 1997.

The Protocol has two purposes. First, where a national from one state who is serving a custodial sentence in another state escapes from custody and returns to his home state, the Protocol allows the sentencing state, with the consent of the home state, to transfer the remainder of the sentence to the home state to continue enforcement. The consent of the fugitive offender is not required to such a transfer. This provision will be of particular value where the home state, for legal or constitutional reasons, does not extradite its own nationals and where at present no action can be taken against the fugitive offender.

The Protocol also enables a serving prisoner who is the subject of a deportation or expulsion order which will result in his eventual removal to be transferred, without his consent but subject to certain safeguards, to the state named in the order to serve the remainder of his sentence. At present, such orders are normally activated only at the end of the sentence. Early activation of the order would enable the state of destination to attach appropriate post-release conditions in more serious cases.

The Government support the Protocol and are considering what primary legislation would be needed before it could be ratified by the United Kingdom.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the differences in prison regime for prisoners in each class of risk assessment within the Category A band separately indicating the conditions for those prisoners presently held in HMP Belmarsh who continue to occupy cells previously designated as a special secure unit. [20334]

Ms Quin: Category A prisoners are assigned to one of three escape risk classifications: standard risk, high risk and exceptional risk.

It is not possible to give a definitive account of prisoner regime by escape category. This will vary with the facilities available within each prison and in particular tends to be significantly different between remand prisons, such as Belmarsh, and dispersal prisons, such as Whitemoor, which hold convicted Category A prisoners.

Within dispersal prisons, additional restrictions will apply to exceptional risk prisoners who are held apart from other prisoners within a Special Secure Unit and who are subject to closed visits. In general terms, high risk prisoners within dispersal prisons have a similar regime to standard risk prisoners with a few additional constraints such as searching, the conduct of visits, allocation to activities, and vetting of letters and telephone calls.

Because of the additional complexities of a large remand prison such as Belmarsh, and in particular the greatly increased levels of prisoner movement with the associated increased risks of escape, high risk prisoners at Belmarsh are held apart from the rest of the prison population within the High Secure Unit (HSU). The regime within the HSU is similar to that within the rest of the prison with the exception that prisoners do not have access to other parts of the prison and all activities such as visits, exercise and gymnasium are conducted within purpose-built facilities in the HSU building itself.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances family visits for remand prisoners previously held in the Special Secure Unit at HMP Belmarsh and currently on trial is permitted in respect of the use of *(a)* the visitors' children's room and *(b)* children's books, crayons or toys. [20335]

Ms Quin: There is no specific children's room for visitors to those prisoners previously held in the Belmarsh Special Secure Unit. A box of toys and games is available for the use of visiting children.

Remand Prisoners (Injuries)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what record is maintained of the number of occasions on which remand prisoners are unable to appear in court as a result of injuries sustained en route; if he routinely receives reports of such injuries; and to whom trial judges report concerns in such cases. [20333]

Ms Quin: Between April 1993 and July 1997, the responsibility for transporting to court all prisoners other than those in the highest security category has progressively been contracted out to the private sector.

The Prisoner Escort and Custody Services of the Prison Service monitor all such contracts and require the submission of reports on all injuries sustained by prisoners while in the contractor's custody. These include details of the injuries sustained, the circumstances in which they were received, for example a road traffic accident, self harm, etc., and the action taken. Any such incident which may call into question the actions of the contractors or their staff is fully investigated by the prisoner escort monitor.

Incidents involving injuries to prisoners in the custody of escort contractors while on their way to court are extremely rare. Only two cases have been recorded where they were serious enough to prevent attendance.

Incidents relating to category A prisoners are reported to Prison Service Headquarters as well as being subject to full reports. However, figures relating to injuries to remand prisoners while in transit to court are not compiled centrally.

Trial judges are able to express any concerns about the late delivery or non-delivery of prisoners to the escort contractor, the escort monitor, the establishment dispatching the prisoner or Prison Service Headquarters.

All cases relating to prisoners moved by private sector contractors are investigated by the escort monitor. If, as a result of this investigation, a prisoner custody officer (PCO) is found to have been at fault, the escort monitor has the power under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to recommend the revocation of the PCO's certificate.

Also, under the terms of the contract, the escort monitor may impose penalty points in cases where the contractor has failed to deliver the service specified. These penalties may lead to the imposition of financial remedies.

Where individual PCOs have not performed their duties satisfactorily they will be subject to the contractor's own disciplinary procedures.

Special Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects Sir Donald Acheson to complete his review of the effect on prisoners' health when detained in a special secure unit; and if he will make a statement. [20283]

Ms Quin: There is currently only one special secure unit in operation at Whitemoor prison. Sir Donald Acheson visited the unit last month and I expect him to submit his report to the Prison Service shortly.

Expulsions and Deportations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons currently serving a prison sentence in England and Wales will be subject upon completion of their sentence to an expulsion or deportation order to *(a)* Ireland, *(b)* states that are party to the European Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons and *(c)* elsewhere. [20285]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Reliable information on those persons currently serving a prison sentence who may, on completion of their sentence, be subject to deportation action can be obtained only through examination of individual case records. Such information is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost. Persons subject to deportation action are entitled to appeal against their stated removal destination and, hence, the issue of which country a person is to be removed to will not be resolved until their relevant appeal rights have been exhausted. In practice, reliable information on removal destination is not available centrally until removal has been effected. I regret that the information requested is not, therefore, available.

Human Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *103*, if the Prison Service was notified of the Government's support for the broad intentions of the UN texts; and if he will make a statement on their implementation. [20338]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service was notified of them, is committed to adhering as fully as possible to those recommendations that affect it, and has responded to occasional queries about them from the relevant United Nations bodies.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Council if she will publish the names of all those people she has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and whether they receive remuneration. [19982]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: All the 21 appointments to which I referred in my answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *130*, are, as I indicated, unpaid. The names of those appointed, and the bodies to which they have been appointed (in each case as members), are as follows:

Imperial College, Governing Body
Mr. W. Banks
Mr. A. Buxton
Dr. D. Chatterji
UMIST, Court
Miss D. Gibbins
Mr. D.A. Robson
University of Hull, Court
Mr. J. Gwinnell
Mr. M. Hollingberry
Mrs. S. Smith
University of Sussex, Court
Mr. M. Burrell
Ms G. Rebuck
Professor B. Supple
University of Ulster, Court
Mrs. M. Breslin
Lod Glentoran
Victoria University of Manchester, Court
Col. J. Timmins
Mr. A. Watson
Council for the Professions Supplementary to Medicine
Mrs. S. Cosgrave
Professor J. Harper
General Medical Council
Mr. J. I. Davies
Ms S. Leggate
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Council
Mrs. R. Berry
Mr. J. Scudamore

Since 2 December I have also appointed the following as members of the bodies listed below, again all on an unpaid basis:

Registered Homes Tribunals, Panel of Experts
Mr. C. E. Boman
Dr. M. A. Ishak
Dr. S. Kumar
Dr. A. Martin
Dr. R. K. Prasad
Mrs. A. Ross
Mr. R. SeQueira
Mr. C. E. Wakefield
Mr. R. Ward
Royal College of Art, Court
Mr. K. Grange.

Anti-drugs Co-ordinator

Mr. Clappison: To ask the President of the Council when she expects *(a)* to receive and *(b)* to publish the strategy of the anti-drugs co-ordinator. [20299]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator—Keith Hellawell—takes up his position formally on 5 January. I expect him to submit his proposals for a new strategy a few months after that, following an extensive consultation process.

The Government hope to publish their strategy document in the Spring.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. David Shayler

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received as to whether Mr. David Shayler should appear before the Intelligence and Security Committee. [20458]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, I have not received any representations on this subject.

Anglo-French Summit

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost of furnishing the Canary Wharf venue for the Anglo-French summit; and what was the contribution from non-governmental sources for furnishing and decorating the venue. [20467]

The Prime Minister: The cost of holding the British French summit at Canary Wharf was as follows:

	£
Transport of Artworks	2,361.75
Transport of Models	2,049.90
Transport and depreciation costs on furnishings	4,959.62
Floral decorations	500.00
Telecommunications	7,334.00
Hire of flags and flagpoles	292.50
Hire of photocopiers	916.52
Interpretation	2,343.00
Government Hospitality Fund (lunch, coffee, kitchen)	18,395.84
Total	39,153.13

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to set measurable targets for the work of the Social Exclusion Unit. [20582]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* I refer to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), 8 December 1997 *Official Report*, column *409*. The Unit will draw up key indicators of social exclusion and recommend how they can be tracked.

British-Ugandan Asian Service

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister who represented the Government at the British-Ugandan Asian Service at Westminster Abbey. [21178]

The Prime Minister: The Government were not represented at the British Ugandan Asian Service at Westminster Abbey. But I welcome this opportunity to place on record my appreciation of the contribution made to British society by the Ugandan Asians since their arrival here 25 years ago.

Agricultural Produce Procurement

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to continue the policy of the Prime Minister promoting increased domestic procurement of agricultural produce; and what plans he has to audit the levels of domestic procurement. [21164]

The Prime Minister: Sourcing of supplies is a matter for the food industry. The Government's policy remains to help our farmers and growers to match their world-class products with a similar level of excellence in marketing.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Care Industry

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the funding arrangements for the training of people aged under 25 years in the care industry; and if he will make a statement. [19290]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* The Department has no plans to review the funding arrangements for the training of people aged under 25 years in the care industry.

Further Education (New Deal)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what provision there will be in the New Deal funds put up for bidding next year to colleges of further education for the consequent impact of those funds on current facilities and infrastructure; and if he will make a statement; [20087]

(2) what assessment he has made of the additional administrative responsibilities placed on current facilities and infrastructure in colleges of further education by the New Deal funds which are to be bid for next year; and if he will make a statement. [20114]

Dr. Howells: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 12 November 1997, FE colleges will have the opportunity to bid for well over £100 million of New Deal funds next year. I am confident of the sector's ability to rise to the challenge and contribute to the success of this programme.

Access and Foundation Courses

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many (i) access and (ii) foundation course students are currently enrolled on courses which *(a)* are and *(b)* are not an integral part of a course of higher education. [20088]

Dr. Howells: The available information on foundation courses is limited. A survey conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council indicated that there were approximately 8,000 students on foundation courses which were integral parts of higher education courses in England in 1995–96. Equivalent figures for foundation courses which are not parts of higher education courses are not available. For access courses, figures collected by the Further Education Funding Council show that there were 27,200 students on access to higher education courses in further education sector colleges and external institutions in England in November 1996. Access courses are classified as further education courses, although some are designed for entry to specific higher education courses.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students currently enrolled on access and foundation courses applied for the course before 23 July; and if he will make a statement. [20089]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of students went on to higher education (i) within one year and (ii) within three years of having completed a foundation or access course in the last year for which figures are available. [20090]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Oxford and Cambridge Universities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received in respect of the Government's plans for Oxbridge funding. [20515]

Dr. Howells: We have received around 200 letters over the last five months about the issue of college fees at Oxford and Cambridge. There have also been debates in both Houses. We have also met representatives of both Universities and their Colleges and, as my hon. Friend knows, I met him and the Master of Gonville and Caius College Cambridge on 2 December.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he last met the Vice-Chancellor of *(a)* Oxford and *(b)* Cambridge University. [20514]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Vice-Chancellors of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge on Wednesday 10 December.

Foundation Schools

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how the new foundation schools will be funded; and how the arrangements for funding these schools will differ from those made for community schools. [20360]

Mr. Byers: Under the new school framework, recurrent funding will be provided by LEAs for community, foundation, and voluntary schools under revised local management of schools (LMS) arrangements. The details of this new LMS regime are currently under consideration, but it is the Government's firm intention that there should be no unfair discrimination between different school categories.

LEAs will be responsible for all the costs of capital work at foundation schools, as they will be for community schools. The only significant difference is that, where they provide a new or additional site for a foundation school, they will convey their interest in the site—excluding the playing fields—to the school's trustees, foundation body or governing body.

School Performance

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what requirements are placed on local education authorities' officers to inform their elected members of the performance of all of the schools in the authority's area, on a regular basis with particular reference to those which *(a)* are underperforming and *(b)* require extra support. [20376]

Mr. Byers: Each local authority is free to determine arrangements where officers report to elected members. However, under the proposals in the School Standards and Framework Bill now before Parliament, each authority will have in place by April 1999 an Education Development Plan agreed by elected members and approved by the Secretary of State, which will set out the performance and targets of all schools within the authority's area, including those which are underperforming or need support.

Higher Education

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy that public spending on higher education should increase in line with the growth in gross domestic product. [21159]

Dr. Howells: The Government intend that, over the course of this Parliament, public spending on education should increase as a proportion of national income, as the cost of social and economic failure is reduced. Detailed plans for the longer term, including for higher education, will be announced next Summer as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Government have already shown their commitment to maintaining and improving quality in higher education, as well as expanding access, through the package of measures announced on 23 September which made available an extra £165 million for higher education for 1998–99.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to implement Recommendation 19 of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. [21158]

Dr. Howells: The Government agree with the National Committee of Inquiry that familiarising students with work is an important way of enhancing their employability. We are already taking action to ensure that more student work placements become available. Next year, our Higher Education and Employment Development Programme will be providing £1.8 million to support projects working to provide more student work placements. These projects will include the creation of a national network to identify, exchange and disseminate emerging good practice on student work placement issues.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he intends to announce the appointment of the chairman of the review committee that will examine the framework for determining pay and conditions of service for those in higher education. [21162]

Dr. Howells: The setting up of an independent review committee, as recommended by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, is the responsibility of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and the higher education unions. My right hon. Friend has offered to facilitate the appointment of a chairman, rather than to nominate the chairman as recommended by the Committee. An announcement on the appointment of a chairman will therefore be a matter for UCEA and the unions.

Mature Students

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance will be given to students over the age of 50 years beginning higher or further education courses in 1998 towards the cost of living and tuition fees. [21156]

Dr. Howells: Under the new arrangements for higher education student support, students aged over 50 will be eligible for means-related help with tuition fees on the same basis as other students. In particular, if they are on low incomes they will continue to receive free tuition.

The majority of students over 50 are part-time and are therefore ineligible for student loans. Under the current student loans scheme full-time students who are aged 50 or over when their course starts are also ineligible. We do not plan any changes in the eligibility requirements for loans—including the age restrictions—for 1998–99. However, we are reviewing the position for future years in the context of the White Paper on lifelong learning due to be published in the new year. Both full and part-time students in higher education will be eligible for Access Funds from 1998–99, regardless of their age.

Students in further education will not be covered by these new arrangements. In 1998–99 they will be able to apply for a discretionary award from their local education authority. These arrangements are being reviewed for subsequent years.

Veterinary and Architecture Students

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional assistance will be given to *(a)* veterinary and *(b)* architecture students, beginning degree courses in 1998 and later, towards the cost of tuition fees for the fourth and subsequent years of their courses. [21157]

Dr. Howells: We have no plans to make special arrangements for additional assistance to such students.

University Applications

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the numbers of students applying to universities for admission in 1998, broken down by parliamentary constituency. [20506]

Dr. Howells: The data requested are not available centrally. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) collects the postcode of applicants, which would enable individual constituencies to be identified, but at present no such analysis has been carried out. It is up to UCAS to decide whether or not to undertake one and to make the results publicly available.

Pupil Testing

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of the National Testing System for fourteen-year-olds, (i) in total and (ii) broken down into costs for *(a)* printing, *(b)* postage of the test papers, *(c)* payments to the external markers and *(d)* fees charged by the company which processes the results, in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [21294]

Ms Estelle Morris: The estimated overall costs of implementing the 1997 tests for 14-year-olds in English, mathematics and science was some £13.4 million. This included: *(a)* printing costs of around £1.6 million; *(b)* distribution costs of around £0.6 million; and *(c)* external marking costs of around £9.4 million. Fees paid to the data collection agency for processing the national results are commercially sensitive, but national data collection costs, which include this fee and other associated costs, were around £0.4 million.

Disability Rights

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will appoint a person with a learning disability to the Disability Rights Task Force; and if he will make a statement on the rights of people with learning disabilities. [21043]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 15 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 7.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to withdraw payment of aid to Zimbabwe. [21204]

Mr. Foulkes: We have made it clear to the Government of Zimbabwe that we cannot provide aid for their programme of land acquisition in its current form, although we are open to discussions on alternative approaches to land reform.

We will be discussing with the Government whether we are able to establish a partnership with them on the basis outlined in the White Paper on International Development as a foundation for future aid commitments.

Tenders

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how she ensures that overseas tenders for which her Department are preparing are conducted in such a way as to ensure *(a)* value for money and *(b)* that all tenders have an equal chance of winning the contract. [21007]

Mr. Foulkes: My Department has in place systems which require that all contracts which are to be funded by DFID are reviewed and agreed by specialist advisers within the Department. We look for value-for-money by ensuring that invitations to tender are clear, unambiguous, and attract the widest possible field of interested suppliers. We are careful to check specifications and instructions to tenderers to ensure that all suitably qualified tenderers have an equal opportunity.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the extent to which the system of allowing export duty payable on aid contracts in India gives all those tendering an equal opportunity. [21009]

Mr. Foulkes: The rules concerning the application of all taxes and duties are clearly defined in contracts which are funded by the Department for International Development. Although these may vary from one contract to another, depending upon the particular needs of the recipient of the aid, all are designed to ensure that everyone who tenders is given an equal opportunity.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports she has evaluated on the circumstances surrounding the current tender for the machinery to monitor and control the supply of electricity to the City of Hyderabad in India; and if she will make a statement. [21008]

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to draw attention to this valuable work. Not only will the project enable the electricity utility to operate more efficiently and therefore at lower cost but, more important, it will greatly improve the efficiency of the use of fuel, thereby reducing emissions and contributing to the fight against global warming. My Department has

been fully represented in the formulation and design of the project, the production of the contract documents, and the evaluation of the bids. East Midlands Electricity International are the British experts representing the Department for International Development in this work, which has also been monitored by experts in electrical engineering and procurement from my Department.

The response to the invitation to tender has been excellent, with five bids submitted. The evaluation process has been completely transparent and fully in accordance with the very clear rules set out in the Instructions to the Bidders.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ponsonby Rules

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the *(a)* Government and *(b)* parliamentary publications relating to the operation of the Ponsonby Rules in relation to the European Communities Act 1972. [19353]

Mrs. Ann Taylor *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* The practice known as the Ponsonby Rule applies to all treaties signed by the United Kingdom which are subject to ratification, acceptance or approval and to any treaty to which the United Kingdom intends to accede. It provides for such treaties to be laid before Parliament for a period of 21 sitting days before the United Kingdom ratifies, accepts, approves or accedes to them. Since 1 January 1997 such treaties when laid before Parliament have been accompanied by an Explanatory Memorandum (copies of guidance for Departments entitled "Guidelines on Explanatory Memoranda for Treaties" were placed in the Libraries of both Houses). The practice has no particular relationship to any Act of Parliament, and there has been no recent Government or Parliamentary publication relating to it.

TREASURY

Taxation and Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees would face combined marginal withdrawal rates of tax and benefits of *(a)* 100 per cent. or above, *(b)* 90 per cent. or above, *(c)* 80 per cent. or above, *(d)* 70 per cent. or above, *(e)* 60 per cent. or above and *(f)* 50 per cent. or above if they were (i) to work an extra one hour per week and (ii) to earn an extra £10 per week before tax. [19009]

Mrs. Liddell: Estimates for the number of families estimated to be facing high marginal deduction rates, after (i) working an extra hour a week and (ii) earning an extra £10 per week are contained in the following table:

Numbers facing high Marginal Deduction Rates (thousands)	*(i) Working an extra hour a week*	*(ii) Earning an extra £10 a week*	*Current estimates*
100+	5	*	5
90+	105	105	105
80+	355	350	360
70+	630	625	645
60+	640	635	655
50+	645	640	660

Note:
The estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000; *denote a figure of less than 2,500. Current estimates, are based on the combination of taxes and benefits which each benefit unit receives.
Source:
Based on Family Expenditure Survey, uprated to 1996–97 levels, adjusted to benefit caseloads using Housing Benefit Management Statistics and the Family Credit Statistical Sample. Figures are calculated for benefit units in receipt of income-related benefits where at least one partner works 16 hours a week or more.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18888]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 4 December 1997, *Official Report,* column *320.*

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19305]

Mrs Liddell: The Treasury employs five Special Advisers, four paid and one unpaid. In addition, two paid appointments to the Council of Economic Advisers have been made on Special Adviser terms. Information on the paybill costs for Special Advisers within individual departments cannot be provided, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned. Information on the total paybill for Special Advisers was given in the answers my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *472–73.*

The Private Finance Projects Taskforce (Treasury Taskforce Ltd.) is a private company. It employs nine staff. Salaries and benefits are a matter for the company but the full annual budget will be below the £2.5 million budget for the former Private Finance Panel, which was stood down on 30 September.

The Task Force on Tax and Benefits does not employ any staff. The Chairman is unpaid and does not receive any expenses.

The remaining members of both Taskforces are officials or private sector secondees filling official posts. It is not possible to distinguish the cost of their time spent on Taskforce-related work.

The Chancellor's Department and Agencies do not employ any review body members.

Business Taxation

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total Exchequer revenues, excluding VAT, have come from business taxation in each of the last five years. [19816]

Dawn Primarolo: The proportion of total revenue from taxes and national insurance contributions that has come from corporation tax, employers' national insurance contributions, non-domestic rates, petroleum revenue tax and other taxes and royalties on business is shown in the table.

Direct taxes on business as a proportion of total tax and national insurance contributions

	Per cent.
1992–93	24.6
1993–94	24.4
1994–95	24.0
1995–96	24.6
1996–97	25.7

The Public Finances

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will restate Table 2.1, page 21, in the "Pre-Budget Report November 1997" to show figures on a cash basis. [19935]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The figures shown in table 2.1 of the "Pre-Budget Report" can be converted onto a cash basis using the projections of money GDP shown in table B.2, page 98.

Overseas Trusts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend United Kingdom tax law to ensure that United Kingdom beneficiaries of overseas trusts are liable to United Kingdom taxes; and if he will make a statement. [19754]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Hitchen and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *575-76.*

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* public sector borrowing requirement on a current balance basis in cash terms and *(b)* cyclically adjusted public sector borrowing requirement on a current balance basis in cash terms, for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02. [19932]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* Table B6 of the "Pre-Budget Report" shows the projections of the public sector current balance as a per cent. of GDP. Estimates of the cyclically adjusted current balance as a per cent. of GDP can be derived from the "Pre-Budget Report" projections of the deviations of output from its trend level, shown in the table, and the published estimates of the effect of changes in GDP on the PSBR, given in the Treasury Occasional Paper "Public Finances and the Cycle". The projections of the current balance and cyclically adjusted current balance as a per cent. of GDP can be converted onto a cash basis using the projections of money GDP shown in Table B2 on page 98 of the "Pre-Budget Report."

Projected deviations of output from its trend level[1] (per cent.)

1996–97: $-\frac{3}{4}$

1997–98: $+\frac{1}{2}$

1998–99: 0

1999–2000: $-\frac{1}{4}$

2000–01: $-\frac{1}{2}$

2001–02: $-\frac{1}{2}$

Note:

Central case, in which it is assumed that output was at its trend level in the first half of 1997. A positive figure indicates that output is above its trend. level.

Public Sector

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy of the Government in relation to the future net wealth of the public sector. [19953]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The Government believe balance sheet data, including public sector net wealth, provide useful information on the conduct of fiscal policy and the state of the public sector. A discussion paper on the public sector balance sheet has been published as part of the consultation process initiated in the "Pre-Budget Report." Meeting the golden rule over the economic cycle should prevent a repeat of the large fall in public sector net wealth in the first half of the 1990s.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors will determine the timing of the introduction of a 10 pence starting rate of income tax; and if he will make a statement. [19936]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* As the Chancellor's "Pre-Budget Statement" made clear, the Government are committed to introducing the 10p starting rate of tax as soon as it is prudent to do so.

Pensioners (Winter Fuel Bills)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the one-off payments to pensioners to assist with their winter fuel bills will be taxed as income. [20121]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* No. These payments will not be taxed.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20528]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* CCTA issued detailed guidance in May 1997 on the handling of the Year 2000 problem. The Treasury is implementing this advice. All contractual relationships with non-compliant non-governmental organisations and suppliers who provide strategic goods and services that will be effected by non-compliance will cease on or before the date when the problem takes effect.

Allergic Reactions

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died from allergic reactions to *(a)* peanuts and *(b)* other foodstuffs during (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996. [20388]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir Patrick Cormack, dated 16 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on the number of deaths due to allergic reactions from peanuts and other foodstuffs in 1995 and 1996.

The figures are given in the table:

Deaths certified as due to allergic reactions from peanuts and other foodstuffs, England and Wales, 1995 and 1996

	Peanuts	*Other foodstuffs*
1995	2	3
1996	0	3

Three deaths in 1995 mentioned allergic reaction to "nuts". These have been classified under "other foodstuffs" although they may have involved peanuts.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many fatalities due to carbon monoxide poisoning there have been in each of the last 10 years. [20723]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Ann Clwyd, dated 16 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question on fatalities due to carbon monoxide poisoning in each of the last 10 years.

The number of deaths in England and Wales from carbon monoxide poisoning (ICD*986) in each of the last ten years are shown in the table.

Year	*Deaths*
1987	1,268
1988	1,524
1989	1,324
1990	1,537
1991	1,508
1992	1,520
1993	1,229
1994	1,206
1995	1,116
1996	1,016

* International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

For the years 1987–92, the deaths shown were those *registered* in the year; for the years 1993–96, the deaths are those that *occurred* in the year.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the Financial Services Act 1986 to permit small tranches of capital to be raised for *(a)* high technology and *(b)* other SMEs. [20962]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The aim of the Financial Services Act 1986 is to give people the protection and the assurance that they need to have confidence to invest. The Government are mindful of the need to ensure that, in doing this, adequate attention is paid to the costs of compliance and to the need to allow sensible market developments.

The Government are aware of the particular financing needs of high technology firms and small to medium sized enterprises. To this end, my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has recently convened a high level group of industry and government experts to provide early advice on the regulatory and fiscal climate affecting the financing of high technology firms.

Tanzania

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the funds raised under the Christian Aid/Jubilee 2000 Coalition Campaign were applied to reduce the UK's bilateral debt owed by Tanzania; what conditions were attached to the award of funds; and what plans he has to allocate any future funds raised in this way to other countries. [20774]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The funds raised under the Christian Aid/Jubilee 2000 are offset against the UK's bilateral debt with Tanzania. No conditions were attached to this debt reduction. There are currently no plans to use the contributions being made by the public for debt reduction for other countries.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current value of funds received and distributed by HM Treasury through the Christian Aid/Jubilee 2000 Coalition; and if he will place in the Library a copy of HM Treasury's agreement with the Government of Tanzania relating to the use of these funds. [20775]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The total value of the funds received up until December 15 as a result of the Christian Aid/Jubilee 2000 campaign is £5,050. This is being used to reduce Tanzania's bilateral debt with the UK. We will seek the agreement of the Tanzanian Government to place the relevant correspondence in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors he took into account in choosing Tanzania as the recipient of funds sent to the Treasury as part of the Christian Aid/Jubilee 2000 Coalition Campaign on debt cancellation; and what consultation his officials conducted with non-governmental organisations in *(a)* Tanzania and *(b)* elsewhere before deciding how to use these funds. [20773]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The use of the Christian Aid/Jubilee 2000 funds to reduce Tanzanian bilateral debt with the UK was agreed by the previous Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). The Tanzanian Government and Christian Aid were consulted at the time of the Paris club meeting in January 1997 at which debt rescheduling for Tanzania was agreed.

Bingo Halls

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed in bingo halls. [20496]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 16 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on the number of people employed in bingo halls.

The number of people who are employed in bingo halls can not be determined to this level of detail. The lowest level which can be provided is for gambling and betting activities (the classification which includes bingo halls as one of the components). Information from the Annual Employment Survey shows that there were 72,500 employees in gambling and betting activities in Great Britain in September 1996.

Paymaster General

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the Paymaster General is inhibited from altering his involvement with the Orion Trust because of inside knowledge of planned changes in tax law; and if he will make a statement. [20978]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *575–76*.

Unemployment Statistics

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *573*, what steps he plans to increase the accuracy of the method used to calculate unemployment statistics. [21140]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 16 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question asking what steps he plans to take to increase the accuracy of the method used to calculate unemployment statistics.

The ONS has recently been reviewing the future presentation and dissemination of labour market statistics. Wide-ranging public consultation was initiated in the May 1997 issue of *Labour Market Trends*, and a summary of responses was published in the October issue. Responses to the consultation indicated strong support for:

—ONS plans to provide an Integrated First Release covering all Labour Market Statistics;

—the proposals to give increased prominence to data from the Labour Force Survey.

It is taking longer than hoped to put together a comprehensive package which meets users' needs. An announcement about the future of labour market statistics will be made in early 1998.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on overseas travel for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991—92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997; and if he will provide a breakdown to show (1) air fares and (2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. [15255]

Mr. Hoon: Except for the Legal Aid Board—established on 1 April 1989—which incurred £4,215 of such expenditure in 1994–95, expenditure on overseas travel is not monitored separately from other travel and subsistence in my Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Chief Executives of HM Land Registry and the Public Record Office will be replying separately.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 16 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about expenditure on overseas travel by the agencies for which his Department is responsible.

Our accounts systems are not designed in such a way as to allow this information to be produced without lengthy research. I regret therefore that your question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Although I stated in answer to a Parliamentary Question tabled in a previous session that the Public Record Office spent £7,708 on overseas travel in 1994–95, my experience of the time taken to produce that figure has guided my reply on this occasion.

Letter from Dr. Stuart Hill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 16 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on expenditure on overseas travel. The information is shown below insofar as it is available:

	Expenditure
(i) 1980–81 (ii) 1987–88 (iii) 1990–91 (iv) 1991–92	Figures could only be provided at disproportionate cost
(v) 1992–93	[1] £4,750
(vi) 1993–94	[1] £3,780
(vii) 1994–95	[1] £8,084
(viii) 1995–96	[1] £2,550
(ix) 1996–97	1. Airfares £5,804 2. Other expenditure £5,180
(x) 1 May–30 September 1997	1. Airfares £8,505 2. Other expenditure £1,896

[1] A breakdown of total expenditure for these years is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

VAT Appeals

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if NHS trusts are entitled to appeal against a decision of HM Customs and Excise to a VAT tribunal. [19995]

Mr. Hoon: Any organisation that pays VAT, including NHS trusts, can appeal against a decision of HM Customs and Excise to a VAT tribunal.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the public cost per hour of proceedings in *(a)* a VAT tribunal and *(b)* a High Court undertaking judicial review of a disputed VAT ruling. [19994]

Mr. Hoon: The average cost per hour of any proceedings in the High Court is £231.19. This includes the cost of maintaining the court room, paying the judiciary and providing administrative assistance. Detailed information is not collected on the cost per hour of proceedings in a VAT tribunal, but the Court Service estimates it to be about £137. Neither figure includes the cost to HM Customs and Exercise of defending a VAT ruling.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15257]

Mr. Hoon: Expenditure by my Department on publicity and on advertising (for recruitment of staff and judicial appointments) is shown in the table.

	LCD HQ		*Legal Aid Board*		*Public Trust Office*
	Publicity	*Advertising*	*Publicity*	*Advertising*	*Advertising*
1993–94	Nil	36,209	141,000	135,259	n/a[1]
1994–95	18,258	66,002	207,000	308,458	Nil
1995–96	76,798	45,341	197,367	254,738	3,617
1996–97	41,053	76,172	200,462	388,362	1,918
1997–98 (year to date)	24,364	117,395	135,205	401,927	1,991
1997–98 (full year estimate)	77,277	258,857	155,000	469,729	1,991

[1] Advertising costs of Public Trust Office prior to 1994–95 are included in LCD Headquarters.

Estimates for 1998–99 cannot be provided as budgets have not yet been determined.

There has been no expenditure on publicity in any of the years specified for the Court Service and the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct and none is planned for 1998–99.

The only advertising that the Court Service carries out is for recruitment. These adverts are placed locally and, as a result, the amount spent could be established only at disproportionate cost.

It is Government policy that the Public Trust Office does not advertise for the services it provides. The advertising costs shown in the table relate to recruitment of staff. There has been no expenditure on publicity in any of the years specified for the public Trust Office.

The Chief Executives of HM Land Registry and the Public Record Office will be replying separately.

Letter from Dr. Stuart Hill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 16 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on the expenditure on all forms of advertising. The information is as follows:

	£
(i) 1993–94	26,787
(ii) 1994–95	81,835
(iii) 1995–96	173,241
(iv) 1996–97	114,496
(v) 1997–98 to date	97,240
(vi) 1997–98 full year estimate	117,000
(vii) 1998–99 planned expenditure	[1]—

[1] Planned expenditure figures for 1998–99 are not yet available. The annual non-staff budget setting process is currently taking place.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 16 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about expenditure on publicity and advertising by the agencies for which his Department is responsible.

Total expenditure by the Public Record Office has been:

	£
1993–94	144,505
1994–95	127,900
1995–96	167,000
1996–97	131,000
1997–98 (year to date)	59,051
1997–98 (full year estimate)	117,700
1998–99 (planned expenditure	120,000

Conditional Fee Agreements

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research his Department *(a)* has carried out, *(b)* has commissioned and *(c)* plans to carry out and publish concerning the effect of the extension of the use of conditional fee agreements and the withdrawal of legal aid for money claims on solicitors' firms; and at what cost. [21278]

Mr. Hoon: KPMG have been commissioned to undertake an analysis of the business case for a solicitor's firm to undertake money claims under conditional fee agreements without requiring that their clients pay money in advance. The cost of the proposal accepted is £61,000 excluding VAT and expenses.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on official hospitality for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997. [15254]

Mr. Hoon: Expenditure on official hospitality is given in the table.

	Official Hospitality			
Financial year	*LCD*[1]	*Legal Aid Board*	*Court Service*	*Public Trust Office*
1980–81	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
1987–88	18,886	Not exceeding £500	n/a	n/a
1990–91	19,023	Not exceeding £500	n/a	n/a
1991–92	20,895	Not exceeding £500	n/a	n/a
1992–93	20,697	Not exceeding £500	n/a	n/a
1993–94	20,477	Not exceeding £500	n/a	n/a
1994–95	16,647	Not exceeding £500	n/a	n/a
1995–96	22,960	Not exceeding £500	6,605	914
1996–97	18,898	Not exceeding £500	4,400	982
1 May to 30 September 1997	4,336	Not exceeding £500	1,870	202

[1] Includes figures for the Public Trust Office and Court Service up until 1995–96. The Public Trust Office became an Agency on 1 July 1994 and the Court Service on 1 April 1995.

Data are not available for 1980–81 as this predates the operation of the department's computerised expenditure monitoring systems.

The Chief Executives of HM Land Registry and the Public Record Office will be replying separately.

Letter from Dr. Stuart Hill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 16 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question on the expenditure on official hospitality. The information is as follows:

	£
(i) 1980–81	Figure not available
(ii) 1987–88	Figure not available
(iii) 1990–91	7,413
(iv) 1991–92	13,993
(v) 1992–93	9,189
(vi) 1993–94	7,083
(vii) 1994–95	12,888
(viii) 1995–96	33,654
(ix) 1996–97	46,036
(x) 1st May–30th September 1997	23,337

Hospitality is defined within the Land Registry as 'Local entertainment costs approved within central guidelines for visitors and/or meetings'. The amounts quoted in the last three years reflect the Land Registry's activities in the international arena with a marked increase in the number and duration of visits by officials responsible for land administration in other countries.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 16 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about expenditure on official hospitality by the agencies for which his Department is responsible.

Total expenditure by the Public Record Office has been:

	£
1993–94	8,298
1994–95	6,752
1995–96	7,120
1996–97	8,220
1 May 1997 to 30 September 1997	8,784

Our pre 1993–94 accounts systems were not designed readily to produce such information and I regret therefore that the figures that you request for earlier years could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Small Claims

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the research that has been commissioned or received into small claims, with special reference to research *(a)* following up the concerns expressed in the National Audit Office survey relating to

unrepresented litigants and *(b)* concerning how many and what types of litigants and what types of case are unable to proceed without legal help or legal aid. [21279]

Mr. Hoon: *(a)* My Department has commissioned no research specifically following up the concerns expressed in the NAO survey. However, both Professor Baldwin's recently published book "Small Claims in the County Courts in England and Wales" and the statistical monitoring undertaken by the Court Service are relevant. *(b)* Consideration is being given as to the feasibility of such a project.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when Professor Baldwin's research into the small claims courts will be published; and what were the terms of reference of his work. [21277]

Mr. Hoon: The report of Professor Baldwin's research "Monitoring the Rise in the Small Claims Limit: Litigants' Experiences of Different Forms of Adjudication" was published on 15 December. He was asked to interview two groups of litigants who had been involved in cases in the range £1,000 to £3,000: a control group whose cases had gone to trial in open court, and those whose cases had been dealt with as small claims arbitrations, and to report his findings.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the factors that underlay the Lord Chancellor's decision to recommend an increase in the small claims limit to £5,000. [21205]

Mr. Hoon The decision was based on a high level of litigant satisfaction with the small claims procedure compared with a lower level of satisfaction with the open court procedure for claims of the same size.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in each year or part year since the small claims limit was increased to £3,000, how many applications were made to rescind the automatic reference to arbitration; and how many of these were granted, broken down by the type of case and the value of the claim. [21276]

Mr. Hoon: The small claims limit was increased to £3,000 in January 1996. During 1996, 712 applications were made to rescind the automatic reference to arbitration, of which 586 were granted. Between January and October this year 696 applications were made and 539 were granted. Details of the type of case and value of claim of those applications that were granted are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in each year or part year since the small claims limit increased to £3,000, how many claims have *(a)* been issued and *(b)* proceeded to a hearing with the small claims court, broken down by (i) personal injury, other negligence, debt, housing and other, and (ii) by value of the claim in the bands (1) under £1,000, (2) £1,000 to £3,000, (3) £3,000 to £5,000, (4) £5,000 to £10,000 and (5) £10,000 to £15,000. [21271]

Mr. Hoon: The "small claims" limit increased to £3,000 in January 1996.

(a) claims are referred to the small claims or arbitration procedure only if they are defended. It is not therefore possible to identify at the point of issue how many claims will be referred to arbitration.

(b) The details of the number of claims that issued in 1996 that proceeded to a small claims arbitration hearing is as follows:

Type	*Under £1,000*	*£1,000–£3,000*	*£3,000–£5,000*	*£5,000–£10,000*	*£10,000–£15,000*	*Unliquidated*	*Total*
Personal injury	880	185	0	0	0	1,320	2,385
Other negligence	7,265	1,945	110	35	0	4,660	14,020
Debt	51,190	12,475	955	185	35	3,190	68,035
Non-possession housing disputes	1,140	440	35	0	0	0	1,690
Other	4,405	1,470	75	0	0	1,980	7,925
Total	64,875	16,545	1,175	220	35	11,230	94,050

(The figures are based on a three month sample and are rounded to the nearest 5. "Other" claims include those concerning breach of contract and return of goods).

Details of the number of arbitrations in 1997 have not yet been collated, but will be available early in the new year.

Actions Data

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many actions have *(a)* been issued and *(b)* proceeded to trial with a value of between £10,000 and £15,000 in each of the last three years, broken down into personal injury, other negligence, debt claims, housing claims and other claims; and what data he has collated on the average costs of these claims. [21275]

Mr. Hoon: During 1996 the number of actions that were issued and proceeded to trial as follows:

	(a) Issued	*(b) Trial*
Personal injury	1,720	16
Other negligence	960	16
Debt	14,940	246
Other (including housing)	5,220	63

These figures are based on a two month sample.

The information requested was not collected centrally prior to 1996. This information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. In addition, details of the number

of actions issued that proceeded to trial during 1997 have not yet been collated, but will be available early in the new year. The information on costs awarded in court was not collected centrally prior to 1997, but will also be available for 1997 early in the new year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her policy for the future of the coal industry. [18325]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government's policy is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *1002–03*, the Government will be reviewing the long-term energy requirements of the nation, and considering the role of coal will clearly be a part of this process.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the decision was made to extend coal contracts with power stations by three months. [20881]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* This is a matter for the generators and RJB Mining plc.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Government intervened over the coal contracts with power stations for 1998. [20882]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Negotiation of coal contracts is a matter for the companies concerned but we have encouraged and we continue to encourage the generators and RJB Mining plc to finalise their negotiations on power station coal deliveries beyond March 1988.

Biotechnology

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the spending level of the *(a)* Biochemical Engineering Research Council and *(b)* Biochemical Engineering Training Council for each of the last 10 years. [19240]

Mr. Battle: In April 1994, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council took over responsibility for research and postgraduate training in biochemical engineering from the former Science and Engineering Research Council. The accompanying figures show expenditure (in cash) on research and training over the last ten years. The research expenditure figure for 1994–95 is inflated because the SERC funded the research on the basis of claims whereas the BBSRC uses an expenditure profile. Similarly, the figures for expenditure on training after 1993–94 are best initial estimates, as the data were calculated on a different basis by the two Councils concerned.

£ thousands

Year	*Research expenditure*	*Training*
1987–88	1,033	1,109
1988–89	2,028	1,298
1989–90	2,357	1,490
1990–91	3,376	1,753
1991–92	4,497	1,842
1992–93	5,914	2,291
1993–94	8,277	2,502
1994–95	9,854	2,300
1995–96	7,043	2,200
1996–97	5,234	1,600
1997–98	[1]5,350	1,100

[1] Estimated.

Benchmarking

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what guidance has been issued within her Department and agencies on benchmarking; and if any consultation exercises have been undertaken; [19583]

(2) how the system of benchmarking will be used, and what criteria will be adopted, to achieve best value for money functions within her Department and its agencies; [19580]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Benchmarking is a widely used management tool and the DTI's Management Best Practice Directorate has been closely involved in developing and promoting it. The Department has a dedicated central point which can advise on these and other quality tools and put staff in touch with others involved in benchmarking activity both within Government and elsewhere. The Department's own Quality Tool Kit also includes information on benchmarking. No consultation exercises have been undertaken on the use of these techniques.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the names of all those people who she has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19977]

Mrs. Beckett: I list the new appointments made by the Department since 1 May 1997. Those which receive some remuneration are identified with an asterisk.

National Consumer Council
Dr. Shamit Saggar*
Mr. Richard Greenslade*
Mrs. Loraine Ashton*
Mr. Michael Green*
Mr. Stephen Locke*
Mr. James Humble*
Miss Helena Weisner*
Welsh Consumer Council
Mrs. Barbara Hicks*
Ms Sioned-Mair Richards*
Mr. Stephen Delahaye*
Scottish Consumer Council
Ms Jane Bennett*
Mr. William Ure*
Mr. John Hanlon*
Hearing Aid Council
Mr. John Raine*

Mr. Jonathan Ormerod*
Ms Christine Pearce*
Gas Consumer Council
Ms Sue Leggate*
Mrs. Linda Williams*
Mr. John Bellis*
Mr. Andres Gomez-Lobo
Ms Gita Sootarsing
Mr. James Corbett
Post Office Users Council for Scotland
Mrs. Patricia Stewart
Mr. Michael Gossip
Post Office Users Council for Northern Ireland
Mr. Gerard Trainor*
Miss Roz Goldie*
Mr. Ted Rafferty
Mr. William Irwin
Mrs. Jane Mckee
Mr. Ernest Stewart
Mrs. Deirdre McAuley
Post Office Users Council for Wales
Mr. Eifion Pritchard*
English Advisory Committee on Telecommunications
Mr. Peter Sayers
Mr. Brian McNally
Mrs. Barbara McClennan
Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications
Mr. Barry Stevens
Mrs. Wendy Reynolds
Mr. Mark Haggar
Northern Ireland Committee on Telecommunications
Mrs. Jean McVitty
Mr. John Kerr
Mr. Brian St. John Collins
Mr. John Campbell
Economic and Social Research Council
Ms B Beckett*
Prof. Hazel Genis*
Prof. M. Gibbons*
Prof. D. Greenaway*
Prof. N. MacCormick*
Prof. L. Borysiewicz*
Prof. A. MacGregor*
Rabbi Julia Neuberger*
T. Robbins*
B. Ross*
Natural Environment Research Council
Dr. Yvonne Olwen*
Prof. Simon Conway Morris*
Prof. Iain Johnston*
Prof. John Lawton* CBE
Prof. G. Randall*
Horticulture Research International
Prof. James Callow*
Prof. Tim Flowers*
Prof. John Gray*
Advisory Committee on Coal Research
Dr. Julia King
Energy Advisory Panel
Dr. Mary Archer
Tony Cooper
N. Evans
D. Green MBE
Dr. Dieter Helm
P. Ibbotson OBE
Prof. A. Kemp
M. Parker
Dr. A. White
Measurement Advisory Committee
B. Goldfinch
W. Stewart
B. Lyons
D. Brown
M. Berridge
B. Gelletly
M. Ford
Overseas Project Board
S. Doughty
London and South East Industrial Development Board
Ann Gardner
M. Rhead
A. Holmes
North West Industrial Development Board
J. C. Dixon
D. McCall
J. Strachan
South West Industrial Development Board
Dr. R. Bown
I. G. Lowe
Eastern Region Industrial Development Board
J. Carter
M. Clarke
D. Collins
Ms C. Dickson
Ms E. Oddie.

Export Initiatives

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish details of the arrangements under which work previously carried out under the Home Office Export Initiative will be carried out by the overseas trade services section of her Department. [20016]

Mrs. Roche: My Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, under the banner of Overseas Trade Services, give advice and assistance to all British companies seeking to trade overseas, including those companies from the security industry. This includes access to help provided under the Export Promoter Initiative and Trade Fair and Overseas Seminar Support Scheme.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Association of Chief Police Officers and *(b)* trade associations representing the policing and security sector concerning the operation of the export initiative previously managed by the Home Office. [20015]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer to her by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 11 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *648*.

Oil Exploration Licences

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list her responsibilities in respect of issuing licences for oil exploration; what monitoring of companies after the issuing of such a licence is undertaken by her Department, with particular reference to the interpretation of clauses within the licence; what sanctions her Department has available in respect of companies found to have caused environmental damage through breach of their licence conditions; and what action her Department has taken in the past three years against such companies. [20107]

Mr. Battle: The Secretary of State grants licences to search and bore for, and get petroleum within Great Britain and her Continental Shelf. In issuing the licences, I seek to ensure the thorough exploration for and economic exploitation of petroleum, while having due regard to the interests of other users of the sea (where appropriate) and the possible impact of licensed activities upon the environment.

Activities carried out under petroleum licences are subject to the obligations contained in Model Clauses attached to the licence as well as the separate conditions controlling their timing, extent and method. The drilling of wells and the development of any discoveries are subject to separate consents which may attract conditions. Failure to comply with these obligations and consents may lead to the revocation of the licence. Compliance monitoring is undertaken by a team of inspectors based in the Department's Aberdeen office, as well as through returns submitted by licenses about their operations and random surveillance flights carried out on a regular basis.

Where petroleum operations have led to suspected breaches of legislation, then papers have been sent to the Procurator Fiscal for consideration of further action. In 1997, there have been three such cases.

Computer (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Ministerial representation on the Committee on the year 2000 problem announced on 27 November. [20375]

Mrs. Roche: My Direction of the Prime Minister the composition of the Group is as follows:

Composition

President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Chair)

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Paymaster General

Minister of State, Ministry of Defence

Minister of State, Department of Health

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office.

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

The chairman of Action 2000 is invited to attend.

Dounreay

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department received the report from the UK Atomic Energy Authority concerning options for environmental remediation at the Dounreay nuclear waste disposal shaft; and when she expects to take a decision on the proposals. [20760]

Mr. Battle: The UKAEA Board endorsed recommendations relating to the Dounreay Intermediate Level Waste Shaft at its meeting on 4 November. My officials immediately started studying the UKAEA's recommendations. I have since received advice from my officials which I am considering. It is clearly important to allow time to give proper consideration to such important issues and it is my intention to consult the Scottish Office and DETR before making a decision.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many of her Department's staff are secondees from the private sector; and which firms they are seconded from. [20947]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: There are 113 secondees working in the Department from the following companies:

Alan Paine Knitwear Ltd.

AMEC Process and Energy Ltd.

AMW Associates

Anglian Water International (UK)

Arthur Anderson

AWE plc

Balfour Beatty Ltd.

Bank of Ireland

Barclays Bank plc

Beaumont Colson Ltd.

BNFL

Boxhome Limited

British Aerospace plc

British American Tobacco Co. Ltd.

British Computer Society

British Embassy Tokyo

British Nuclear Fuels

British Steel plc

British Telecom plc

British SI

Bt International Business

BT plc

Business Link

Coopers and Lybrand

CRL

Crosrol Ltd.

Deloitte and Touche
Drinks Marketing Consortium
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Epinet Communications plc
Ericsson Ltd.
Ernst and Young Services Ltd.
Etrl Europe Ltd.
European Gas Turbines (GEC Alstrom)
Ferryfast Produce Ltd.
FINA plc
Frank Roberts and Sons Ltd.
GEC Marconi Avionics Ltd.
GEC Marconi Communications Ltd.
General Accident
General Traffic Ltd.
Genesis Communications
Geoteam Wimpol Ltd.
Glaxo Wellcome plc
Glengarnock Garments Ltd.
Grant Thornton
Guiness Brewing Worldwide Ltd.
Hambros Bank Ltd.
Herbert Smith
Huntings Engineering Ltd.
Hyder plc
ICI Chemicals and Polymers Ltd.
ICI plc
International Distributor Centre
International Knitwear
John Laing International Ltd.
John Swires and Sons Ltd.
Jones Cranes Ltd.
Kidsons Impey
Lancashire Enterprises plc
Lanimer Knitwear Ltd.
L. G. Mouchel and Partners
Lockstair Ltd.
M. A. I. D. plc
Madge and Hoyle Ltd.
Marks and Spencer plc
Matra Marconi Space UK Ltd.
Meggitt plc
MITI
Mobil
Morlands (Glastonbury) Ltd.
Morris Singer Ltd.
Nat West Markets
NatWest
NHS Supplies
Normalair-Garrett Ltd.
North Cape (Scotland) Ltd.
Nuclear Electric Ltd.
Ove Arup and Partners
Pirelli Cables Ltd.
Price Waterhouse
Prince Associates
Reyrolle Projects Ltd.
River Don Castings Ltd.
Rover Group Ltd.
Royal Bank Leasing Ltd.
Russo-British Chamber of Commerce
Siemens ATM
Silver Altman
Sims Portex Ltd.
Smith Kline Beecham
Texaco Ltd.
The Bank of England
The Export Association
The Institute of Export
The West India Committee
Thomas Chislett
Turner and Newell plc
Unilever
Unilever International
World Trade Development Limited
York Synthetics Ltd.

Postal Services

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what mechanisms are in place to oversee and regulate operational matters within the Post Office. [20944]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Responsibility for operational matters within the Post Office rests with the Board and management.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to review the arrangements for the regulation of the Post Office. [20945]

Mr. Ian McCartney: This issue will be considered in the context of our review of the Post Office.

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the implications of the European Parliament and Council Directive on Common Rules for the Development of Community Postal Services and the Improvement of Quality of Service for the Post Office, and on the timetable for transposing the directive into United Kingdom law. [21110]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Directive provides a regulatory framework for the development of European postal services and is expected to raise service standards and increase competition throughout the EU. Minimal change will be required from our efficient, low cost and profitable Post Office. The Directive must be transposed into UK law within one year of adoption.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if her Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date her Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20523]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The DTI's own programme of millennium compliance projects is due to be completed by April 1999 and it incorporates activity to ensure that the supply of IT goods and services and other goods containing embedded integrated circuit chips to the Department and exchanges of computer data

between the Department and non-governmental organisations are also compliant. This work includes ensuring compliance where such services or exchanges are delivered through or supported by a non-governmental organisation's own IT systems.

Sterling Levels

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received concerning the impact of current levels of sterling on *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* exporting. [20898]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* I receive numerous representations from business about many aspects of economic performance, including the impact of the current level of sterling on the manufacturing sector and exports. Business people tell me frequently that they need macroeconomic stability over the medium term in order to succeed. The economic policies followed by the Government are designed to achieve that stability.

Toyota

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will establish the extent to which the French offered abatement of social and employment regulations for the projected new Toyota car factory. [20915]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* In accordance with the State Aids Framework for the Motor Industry, the French authorities will need to seek Commission approval for aid to the investment project. Abatement of social and employment regulations is unlikely to fit within the criteria of accepted support.

Structural Funds

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to secure continued structural fund support for the regions from the European Union. [19398]

Mrs. Roche: Following the publication of the Commission's communication "Agenda 2000" in July, we are discussing the reform of the European Structural and Cohesion Funds with the Commission and other Member States, with the aim of securing a package which is fair to all Member States—especially to the United Kingdom and its regions—affordable and durable, and simpler and more efficient.

Energy

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research her Department has commissioned into the use of coal as a clean source of energy; and how much money the Government are planning to spend on this research. [21291]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 6 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *276*.

My Department has undertaken a detailed review of the UK's future clean coal technology requirements in consultation with industry and universities. This review has just been completed and examined what further support the Government should provide to clean coal technology research, development and demonstration. An announcement will be made about the outcome of the review once Ministers have had time to consider the review's recommendations alongside those arising from the Department's wider Comprehensive Spending Review exercise.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much coal, gas oil and electricity has been imported into the United Kingdom in the calendar years 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997; and how much she estimates will be imported in 1998, 2008, and 2018; and for each of these years, what estimate she has made of the cost of the imports of each of these energy sources. [21274]

Mr. Battle: The latest available information is as follows. Data are only available up to and including the third quarter of 1997. Similar data for the years 1998, 2008 and 2018 are not available. The previous Administration published energy projections for the UK as Energy Paper 65 in March 1995, which is available in the Libraries of both Houses. While these projections implicitly included the contribution from imports to the UK's energy supply, projections of imports themselves were not separately made.

It should be borne in mind that the UK also exports fuels, and has been a net exporter of fuels in both volume and value terms in each year since 1993. In 1996, net exports of fuels benefited the UK Balance of Payments by £4.2 billion. Indications are that net exports of fuels will benefit the UK economy by a similar amount in 1997.

Volume of imports of fuels into the UK

Million tonnes of oil equivalent

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Q1 to Q3 1997*
Coal and other solid fuels	14.2	13.0	10.8	11.5	12.7	11.1
Crude oil and oil products	73.6	75.4	67.6	61.5	62.6	46.2
Natural gas	5.5	4.3	3.0	1.3	1.4	1.0
Electricity	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.0
Total	94.7	94.2	82.9	75.7	78.2	59.2

Value of imports of fuels into the UK

£ million

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Q1 to Q3 1997*
Coal and other solid fuels	744	731	598	601	694	554
Crude oil and oil products	5,456	5,844	7,930	4,778	5,857	3,845
Natural gas	397	327	231	105	117	72
Electricity	369	426	388	408	391	289
Total	6,965	7,328	6,148	5,892	7,059	4,760

Source:

Volumes—Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1997 and Energy Trends.

Values—HM Customs and Excise.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the known extent of the United Kingdom's indigenous sources of coal, gas and oil; and what is her estimate, based on present consumption levels, of when each will run out. [21272]

Mr. Battle: Remaining reserves in present discoveries of oil on the UK Continental Shelf at the end of 1996 are estimated to be up to 2,025 million tonnes. For gas the estimate is 1,960 billion cubic metres. These existing reserves, at 1996 depletion rates, could last for 16 and 22 years respectively. However, additional reserves continue to be discovered each year, and it is therefore likely that production of oil and gas will continue beyond these dates. Allowing for the full potential from as yet undiscovered reserves raises the estimates of reserves to 5,075 million tonnes of oil and 3,795 billion cubic metres of gas. At 1996 depletion rates, total oil and gas reserves could thus last for 39 and 42 years respectively. However these estimates are highly uncertain and future depletion rates will be affected by prices and the utilisation of the UK-Belgium gas interconnector which will provide opportunities for sales into Europe.

For coal, the remaining reserves at existing mines, which could be extracted economically, were estimated to be around 1 billion tonnes at the end of 1994, sufficient for 20 years at current rates of production. However, additional coal reserves in the UK are substantial and their availability and rate of depletion will depend on future energy prices and the demand for coal.

HEALTH

Medical Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many papers published on medical issues which his Department has funded in whole or part have been found to rest on bogus research in the last year. [16682]

Ms Jowell: None as far as the Department is aware. All research reports are peer reviewed and quality assured.

Dialysis Treatment (South Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many renal patients from the South Lancashire health area per thousand receive dialysis treatment; and what is the national average. [18152]

Mr. Boateng: Sixty-six South Lancashire residents were receiving renal dialysis as at 30 September 1997. This equates to 0.21 per cent. of population of 310,000. Figures are not collected on the same basis nationally.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19307]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health employs two special advisers.

The number and identity of special advisers in each Department was previously provided in a written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *615–17*. Information on the total paybill for special advisers was provided in the answers my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbition (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

The total number of Task Force members is 9; these are all unpaid.

The current number of Review panel and Advisory Group members is 41. All of these are unpaid.

In addition, a Royal Commission into long-term care of the elderly has just been announced which will have 12 members, all unpaid.

Insulin

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to monitor the consequences of standardising insulin strengths; and what have been the results of such monitoring. [19252]

Ms Jowell: The Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Control Agency are responsible for the continuous monitoring of the safety of all licensed medicines and the safety of insulin is therefore under continuous review. Monitoring the safety of medicines includes assessment of reports of suspected adverse drug reactions, continuous scrutiny of the medical and scientific literature and review of safety reports produced by manufacturers. The Medicines Control Agency is not aware of significant safety issues having arisen as a result of standardising insulin strengths. The Medicines Control Agency and Committee on Safety of Medicines will continue to monitor closely the safety of insulins.

Silicone Breast Implants

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision there is within the NHS in England for women who suffer from ruptured silicone breast implants, to have them removed. [19275]

Mr. Boateng: The decision whether to remove a silicone breast implant is a clinical one between patients and clinicians.

Cancer

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to improve the identification and treatment of male cancers; what assessment he has made of the use of gene therapy in such treatment; and what plans he has to support research in this area. [19504]

Mr. Boateng: The two major male cancers are testicular and prostate cancer.

Raising awareness of cancer among general practitioners and patients and encouraging them to be alert that symptoms may be due to serious disease such as cancer is an important aspect of the Government's policy

for cancer services set out in "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services", copies of which are available in the Library.

In September 1995, the Imperial Cancer Research Fund jointly with the Department of Health launched a campaign to encourage testicular awareness through publication of a leaflet entitled "A Whole New Ball Game" so that testicular cancer could be detected early. There have been marked improvements in the treatment of testicular cancer over the last 20 years and now over 95 per cent. of patients can be cured.

Professional bodies in the United States of America and the United Kingdom have published guidelines on treatment of prostate cancer. The Department of Health funded Clinical Oncology Information Network, jointly with the British Association of Urological Surgeons, has produced some further guidelines which are currently out for consultation and are due to be published next year.

The National Screening Committee has recommended that there is currently no case for a national screening programme for prostate cancer. This recommendation has been accepted by Ministers. There is at present no medical evidence to suggest that a screening programme for testicular cancer should be introduced.

Gene therapy for cancer is still at the research stage. At January 1997, 10 gene therapy trials involving cancer were approved in the UK by the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee. None of these involve testicular or prostate cancer. However all cancer research has the potential to lead to developments in the treatment of other forms of cancer.

The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The Council is currently co-ordinating four trials in the area of testicular cancer. These are: a randomised trial of two schedules of radiotherapy for stage 1 seminoma of the testis, following orchidectomy; a randomised trial of single agent carboplatin with radiotherapy in the adjuvant treatment of Stage 1 seminoma of the testis, following orchidectomy; a randomised trial of 3 × Bleomycin, Etoposide and Cisplatin (BEP) versus 3 × BEP + 1 × Etoposide and Cisplatin (EP) and the five day schedule versus three days per cycle in good prognosis germ cell cancer; a retrospective study of second cancers following radiotherapy for stage 1.

The Council is co-ordinating two trials in the area of prostate cancer. These are: a double blind placebo-controlled trial of oral sodium clodronate for locally advanced prostatic adenocarcinoma; a double blind placebo-controlled trial of oral sodium clodronate for metastatic prostatic adenocarcinoma.

The Council have recently awarded two grants in the area of male cancers with a total value of £50,000. Research into male cancers is underpinned by a significant amount of basic research relevant to all cancers.

While the Council does not support any work on gene therapy in the treatment of male cancers, it does provide support for more basic research into gene therapy which will underpin and inform future more applied work in the area.

The Department of Health's Policy Research Programme (PRP) is currently undertaking a systematic review of minimally invasive therapy for benign prostatic hyperplasia and cancer. The study is being undertaken at the University of Newcastle at a cost of some £40,000.

A study into the development and clinical evaluation of trans-rectal ultrasound devices for thermotherapy of benign prostatic hyperplasia is currently being undertaken at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at a cost of £130,000.

In addition another study, a mortality study of cadmium exposed workers with particular reference to lung and prostatic cancer, was completed last year and has reported. The study was undertaken at Imperial College at a cost of £32,000.

The National Health Service Research and Development Programme's Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Programme has also undertaken two studies into prostate cancer.

These are: a systematic review of detection, management and screening for prostatic carcinoma, at a cost of approximately £54,000; a review of evidence on the cost-effectiveness of different strategies for detecting and managing prostatic carcinoma, at an approximate cost of £13,000.

These two studies have reported. The HTA Programme is developing work on treatment for the spectrum of prostate cancers likely to be revealed by a screening programme. If more successful treatments can be developed it may be appropriate to look again at the potential effectiveness of introducing a screening programme at a future date. The HTA Programme is also funding three projects on treatment for benign prostatic hyperplasia, costing £785,000 over four to five years.

The NHS R and D Cancer Programme has funded a systematic review of the early natural history of prostate, skin and oral cancers at a cost of £46,000.

Product Licensing

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the minutes of discussions between the Licensing Authority and Marketing Authorisation holders associated with the granting of product licences; [20509]

(2) if he will publish the recommendations of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [20510]

Ms Jowell: Discussions associated with the granting of product licences, and the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, are usually confidential between the parties concerned, since they may concern commercially sensitive information.

We are committed to making available as much information as possible. We have therefore asked the Medicines Control Agency to examine its current policies on access to information about medicines. We will consider, in due course, what further action may be necessary to maximise such access while safeguarding legitimate confidential interests. We shall do so, taking account of the White Paper on Freedom of Information we published this month and in the context of European Community licensing and control procedures.

Meals on Wheels

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* those health trusts which charge VAT for meals they provide as part of a meals on wheels service and *(b)* those that do not. [21137]

Mr. Boateng: The Department collects information on the number of meals prepared and supplied by the National Health Service as part of a meals on wheels service. In the annual collection carried out in autumn 1996, the following local authorities used the NHS to supply some of their meals on wheels: Leicestershire, Surrey, Devon, Somerset, Staffordshire, Calderdale, Stockport, East Riding, and North Yorkshire.

The information collected centrally does not, however, cover the way in which the NHS charges the local authority for these meals.

NHS Appointments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects appointments to all vacant chairmen and non-executive posts in NHS trusts in Buckinghamshire to be made; and if he will make a statement. [20820]

Mr. Milburn: The outstanding appointments will be made as soon as possible.

Optical Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department issued guidance to opticians giving clarification of general ophthalmic services procedures; to what extent the measures it contains are enforceable; what estimate he has made of the regional impact of the procedures on take up of *(a)* eye tests and *(b)* free eye tests for those on benefits; and in what areas the advice differs from previous guidance issued by his Department. [20926]

Mr. Milburn: The guidance, issued in November 1997, is only intended to aid understanding of the National Health (General Ophthalmic Services) Regulations 1986 and the National Health Services (Optical Charges and Payments) Regulations 1997. These Regulations set out the statutory obligations which Optometrists and Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners, who contract to provide general ophthalmic services, are required to observe.

The guidance reflects advice given by the Department in response to casual inquiries over recent years and is not expected to alter the trend in the increase in the overall number of sight tests which is currently running at about 2.6 per cent. per annum.

Food Poisoning and Allergy Deaths

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risk associated with eating each type of food linked with fatal cases of food poisoning, infection or allergic reaction on which his Department collates data. [20768]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health keeps food poisoning issues under review. The Government are advised on this matter by the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF). The ACMSF has issued the following reports;

Report on Vacuum Packaging and Associated Processes (1993)

Salmonella in Eggs (1993)

Campylobacter (September 1993)

Report on Verocytotoxin Producing Escherichia coli (1995)

Report on Poultry Meat (1996).

Copies of these publications are available in the Library. The ACMSF's reports include assessments of the risks associated with foods and food processes and include recommendations to both the food industry and the consumer.

The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment is currently considering the factors that influence the development of peanut allergy in infants and young children and is preparing advice to mothers. A report is expected in the spring.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the National Institute for Clinical Excellence can compel local purchasers to buy drugs and treatments of proven effectiveness. [20821]

Mr. Milburn: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will develop and disseminate clinical guidelines based on relevant evidence of clinical and cost-effectiveness.

It will remain for individual clinicians to judge what is the best treatment for particular patients.

SCOTLAND

Urquhart Castle

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the timetable for his Department's consideration of the Urquhart Castle planning application; and if he will make a statement. [19738]

Mr. Dewar: I am currently considering Historic Scotland's Notice of Proposed Development for improved visitor facilities at Urquhart Castle and expect to reach a decision in the near future on how this proposal is to be processed.

Teaching Quality

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if teaching quality assessment will continue in Scotland after 1998. [21152]

Mr. Wilson: In response to the recommendations in the report of the Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council have proposed that they cease Teaching Quality Assessment on completion of the current cycle in 1998.

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the shortfall in the number of NHS nurses in each specialty in Scotland, by health board area, on 1 December. [21160]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is not available centrally, although vacancies, including those which have lasted for more than three months, are monitored at 31 March by the Pay Review Body, and the indications are of a small increase in the levels in 1997 compared to 1996 for Scotland. Contacts with the Service, particularly through the annual exercise to forecast student nurse intakes to colleges five years ahead, do no indicate any general problem, although there are recruitment difficulties for certain specialist areas.

Higher Education

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish a Scottish Forum for Higher Education to advise him on the strategic direction of higher education in Scotland. [21154]

Mr. Wilson: I expect to announce a decision, on the Garrick recommendation that I should establish a Scottish Forum for Higher Education, early in the New Year.

Education Standards

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals the Action Group on Scottish Education has made to *(a)* raise education standards and *(b)* reduce truancy levels in Scottish schools. [21150]

Mr. Wilson: Implementation of the Government's initiative to raise standards in Scottish schools is being overseen by the Action Group on Standards in Scottish Schools. I chair the Group and membership is widely drawn from within and beyond education.

In September, with the endorsement of the Action Group, we issued for consultation a strategy paper for the development of a framework of school targets in key areas with national introduction in the school year 1998–99. The key areas are, in the first instance, literacy, numeracy and attainment. The outcome of the consultation was discussed by the Group on 15 December. The Group gave broad support to the principle of target setting; agreed that improvement could be achieved in every school; and agreed also that comparability among similar schools was important. The Action Group agreed to meet again in February to take matters forward.

Other areas such as attendance are of critical importance to a school's ability to meet performance targets. In due course, I shall be seeking the Action Group's views on the scope for setting targets in this, and other crucial areas.

Sixth Year Colleges

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is his policy to encourage the creation of sixth year colleges in Scotland to teach subjects at advanced higher level. [21149]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend has no such policy.

Veterinary and Architecture Students

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional assistance will be given to *(a)* veterinary and *(b)* architecture students beginning degree courses at Scottish institutions in 1998 and later towards the cost of tuition fees for the fourth and subsequent years of their courses. [21155]

Mr. Wilson: Scottish domiciled students beginning degree level courses in veterinary medicine or architecture at Scottish institutions in 1998 or later will be assisted on the same basis as those studying most other subjects. Where the course is one year longer than the comparable course in England and Wales, they will not be liable to contribute to their tuition costs in the final year.

Mature Students

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance will be given to students over the age of 50 years beginning higher or further education courses in Scotland in 1998 towards the cost of living and tuition fees. [21151]

Mr. Wilson: Under the new student support arrangements for full-time higher education, students aged over 50 will be eligible for means-related help with tuition fees on the same basis as other students, which means that if they are on low incomes they will continue to receive free tuition.

Under the current student loans scheme full-time students who are aged 50 or over when their course starts are not eligible and we do not plan any changes in those arrangements for academic year 1998–99. We will however be reviewing the position for future years in the context of the move to 100 per cent. loans for maintenance. Both full-time and part-time students in higher education will be eligible for Access Funds from academic year 1998–99, regardless of their age.

Students in further education will not be affected by these changes and will continue to be able to apply for a bursary from their college or education authority, as appropriate.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* distribution of abattoirs in the United Kingdom which are approved for organic livestock; and what is the (i) procedure and (ii) cost of registering as an organic abattoir. [18883]

Mr. Morley: The production standards of the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) require abattoirs slaughtering organically reared animals to be registered with an approved organic inspection and certification body. Six such bodies exist in addition to UKROFS itself. Registration is designed to ensure that there is an audit trail to demonstrate that meat sold as organic has come from organically reared animals and to provide reassurance on welfare and handling standards. In order to register, the abattoir must demonstrate, to the inspection and certification body, compliance with the requirements. The costs vary, as each body has its own scale of charges, but typically would be in the region of £210 per annum for registration and inspection plus compliance costs, for example of record keeping.

UKROFS holds records of 29 abattoirs certified for organic production: 22 in England, two in Wales, four in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland.

Beef

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what circumstances it is permissible to export beef products derived from animals which are over 30 months of age. [20314]

Mr. Rooker: The export of beef products obtained from bovine animals of any age slaughtered in the United Kingdom is prohibited. The re-export of products made from beef obtained from bovine animals slaughtered outside the UK is permitted.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet farming representatives regularly in order to update them on progress in lifting the ban on beef exports; and if he will make a statement. [20246]

Mr. Rooker: I have regular discussions with farming representatives which include progress on lifting the export ban. The Scientific Steering Committee has given a positive opinion on the principle of the Date Based Export Scheme. We will be discussing next steps with the Commission shortly. First discussion of the Export Certified Herds Scheme at the Standing Veterinary Committee is expected soon.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of beef imports to the United Kingdom originate from cattle aged below 30 months; and if he will make a statement. [20247]

Mr. Rooker: Under the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) Regulations 1996, imported beef sold in the UK must be derived from cattle under 30 months of age at slaughter. There is an exemption from this requirement in respect of beef derived from cattle born, reared and slaughtered in the following countries (which the Government regard as BSE-free):

Argentina
Australia
Botswana
Brazil
Mauritius
Namibia
New Zealand
Paraguay
Poland
South Africa
Swaziland
Uruquay
USA
Zimbabwe.

In 1996 these countries accounted for 48 per cent. of total UK imports. There were no imports from Poland.

Mr. MacGregor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the risk of contracting new-variant CJD as a result of eating beef on the bone; and how this differs from his earlier assessment of CJD risk in eating beef prior to the latest SEAC advice on boning. [20472]

Mr. Rooker: I have published SEAC's view that there is a 95 per cent. chance of no cases and a 5 per cent. chance of one case of new-variant CJD arising as a result of exposure from the dorsal root ganglion in food in 1998. Previous studies did not identify this tissue separately as one contributing to infectivity levels.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will introduce further controls on specified risk material in Great Britain; if they will apply to imports; and if he will make a statement. [21486]

Dr. John Cunningham: I received advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) in May that our existing controls on specified bovine material and heads of sheep and goats should be extended to cover the spleen of all sheep and goats and the spinal cord of sheep and goats aged over 12 months or with one permanent incisor tooth erupted through the gum. In addition, SEAC advised that all the controls should be applied to imports. I was pleased, therefore, when the European Commission adopted in July Decision 97/534/EC which provides for Community-wide controls on the use and destruction of specified risk material (SRM) and for controls on products of animal origin imported into the Community to ensure they are SRM-free. In reaching agreement on that Decision I accepted that the Community-wide controls should take effect from 1 January 1998. However, it subsequently became clear that the Decision would create serious practical difficulties, in particular for importers of pharmaceutical and medical products. The Commission therefore proposed a new Decision to replace 97/534/EC which took account of these problems.

The Standing Veterinary Committee failed to agree on a new Decision to replace 97/534 but did agree to postpone its implementation until 1 April 1998. As I have made clear previously, however, I am not prepared to tolerate any slippage in the introduction of Community-wide controls on SRM. I have therefore decided, in the interests of public health, to introduce unilateral interim controls in Great Britain. I have accordingly laid before Parliament today the Specified Risk Material Regulations 1997 and the Specified Risk Material Order 1997, both of which will come into force on 1 January 1998. Together, these consolidate existing national legislation providing for destruction of certain bovine materials and heads of sheep and goats and extend

them to the spleen of all sheep and goats and spinal cord of sheep and goats over 12 months of age. They will also prohibit imports of specified risk material (SRM) except where they are for technical use. Imports of certain animal products for food and animal feed, including imports from EU Member States, will need to be accompanied by official veterinary certification confirming that they do not contain and were not derived from SRM. Products manufactured before 1 January 1998 and those containing material derived from Australia and New Zealand will be exempt from this requirement.

Equivalent legislation is being introduced in Northern Ireland to come into force at the same time.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of home-produced beef is from *(a)* steers, *(b)* heifers and *(c)* young bulls. [21198]

Mr. Rooker: Between Janaury and October 1997, 54 per cent. of home killed beef and veal by weight was from steers, 30 per cent. from heifers and 16 per cent. from young bulls. Cattle killed under the Over Thirty-month Scheme, Selective Cull and Calf Processing Aid Scheme are not included within home killed beef and veal production.

Fisheries

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the membership, terms of reference and date of reporting of the Review of Fisheries Legislation and Administration he announced in July. [20359]

Mr. Morley: We hope to announce the terms of reference of the Review of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Legislation, and the membership of the review team shortly.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the value of the ewe premium in each EU country. [20367]

Mr. Rooker: The final rate of Sheep Annual Premium for the 1997 scheme will not be set until early in the new year. The latest Commission estimate of the premium per ewe applying in all member states of the EU is ECU 14.206. Balance payments in each member state will be made at the premium rate set, (less advances paid) converted into national currency using the conversion rates applying to the scheme on 4 January 1998. At the current conversion rate the estimated total premium in sterling would be £11.50.

Lambs

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the average market price for lambs for slaughter received by farmers, for each month since January 1995 at British markets. [20366]

Mr. Rooker: The average price of finished lambs is published by the Department in the Agricultural Market Report Part 1, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. The prices are collected by the Meat and Livestock Commission on a weekly basis and cover markets in England and Wales.

Retail Butchers and Small Abattoirs

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the factors leading to increases in the running costs of *(a)* retail butchers and *(b)* small abattoirs in recent years. [20364]

Mr. Rooker: The Government carry out a cost compliance assessment on the financial implications of all new legislation and the likely effects on small businesses such as retail butchers and small abattoirs. These Regulatory Appraisals (previously known as Cost Compliance Assessments) are placed before Parliament when legislation is laid and are available from the Library of the House. We are not in a position to take follow-up action to determine how accurate are the estimates made, nor to update them for the effects of inflation.

Krebs Report

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Krebs's Report on badgers and bovine TB. [21012]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that Professor Krebs' Report on Bovine Tuberculosis in Cattle and Badgers is published today, as is the Government response to the report.

In November 1996, Professor John Krebs FRS began scientific review on behalf of the then Government into the links between bovine tuberculosis and badgers. His terms of reference were:

> "To review the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle and badgers and assess the scientific evidence for links between them; to take account of EU policies on reducing and eliminating the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle; to take account of any risk to the human population; and accordingly to review, in the light of the scientific evidence, present Government policy on badgers and tuberculosis and to make recommendations".

Professor Krebs was assisted in his review by Professor Roy Anderson FRS, Professor Ivan Morrison, Professor Douglas Young, Professor Tim Clutton-Brock FRS, and Dr. Christl Donnelly, as well as by two research assistants.

The Government are most grateful for the vigour, and rigour with which Professor Krebs and his Team have tackled their remit. They believe that the report represents the best available scientific advice across this difficult area which is of great interest both to farmers, whose livelihood can be badly affected by bovine tuberculosis, and to conservation groups. The Government are disposed to accept the recommendations in the report in principle, subject to further consideration of the public expenditure, legal and practical implications.

The report concludes that the available evidence, albeit largely indirect, strongly supports the view that badgers are a significant source of TB in cattle; but that it is not possible to state how large a contribution badgers make to cattle infection.

The main recommendations are that:

(a) the current policy of limited culling of badgers should end, and be replaced by a policy of no culling in most of the country;

(b) a trial should be set up in certain areas with a history of repeated occurrence of TB to quantify the efficacy and cost effectiveness of badger culling to control bovine TB. Culling of all badgers will take place in some of the trials areas on a carefully designed experimental basis. This will be compared with the culling of all badgers assumed to be linked with bovine TB outbreaks in other trial areas, and no culling of badgers in a last set of trial areas. The aim will be to establish a rigorous scientific foundation for policy in the future, which should benefit all with an interest in this area;

(c) outside the culling trial areas, there should be an experimental comparison of the effectiveness of different cattle husbandry methods in controlling bovine TB. The livestock industry should take the lead here, with help from Government;

(d) the Government's research strategy for bovine tuberculosis should be redirected, and in particular there should be new work on developing a vaccine to protect cattle against TB.

The Government recognise that the subjects covered by the report are of profound concern both to those in badger conservation groups, and to livestock farmers. Account also needs to be taken of the fact that bovine tuberculosis can be transmitted to humans, although the number of cases is very low because of measures such as milk pasteurisation. The Government are therefore setting a period of two months (until 27 February 1998) for comments on how the recommendations should be implemented.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many full-time employees in his department are paid at an hourly rate of between *(a)* £3.42 and £3.50, *(b)* £3.51 and £3.75 and *(c)* £3.76 and £4. [20612]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Staff in the Department and Agencies are salaried and are not paid by the hour. However, I am able to provide a breakdown based on salary levels divided by normal full-time working hours of 36 hours per week in London or 37 hours elsewhere. This is as set out. The figures are based on 1997 salaries which took effect from 1 April.

	Full-time staff paid between £3.42 and £3.50/hour	*Full-time staff paid between £3.51 and £3.75*	*Full-time staff paid between £3.76 and £4/hour*
Core-MAFF	57	561	86
PSD	10	2	0
VMD	0	0	0
VLA	0	0	0
CSL	0	0	1
MHS	0	0	6
CEFAS	0	1	0
FRCA	0	1	0

Farm Animal Welfare

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals to improve farm animals' welfare he has received from the Council of Ministers to be carried forward during the UK presidency of the EU. [20977]

Mr. Morley: The last time the European Commission submitted a proposal on farm animal welfare for consideration by the Council of Ministers was in June 1997. This was the proposal concerning additional standards for road vehicles used to carry livestock on journeys exceeding eight hours, which is currently under discussion in the Council. We have been pressing the Commission hard—but so far fruitlessly—to bring forward their overdue proposals to update the EU rules on the welfare of laying hens and the welfare of animals and poultry at slaughter, as well as their promised proposal to safeguard the health status of breeding pigs resting at staging points. These are all subjects we wish to progress during our forthcoming Presidency. We will keep up our pressure on the Commission.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the current review of social security will include the system for paying funeral expenses to poor families. [16860]

Mr. Denham: The payment of funeral expenses will not be considered specifically within the current review programme. We will, however, consider whether changes to the scheme are needed during the Department's on-going review of Social Security.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to protect sufferers of asbestos-related diseases from the provisions of the Social Security Bill in respect of the backdating of claims to one month. [19324]

Mr. Bradley: The proposed rules will provide for up to one month's automatic backdating for non-income related benefits and up to month's backdating of claims for income-related benefits in specified situations. This will include circumstances where the person is ill or disabled and has no relative, friend or adviser to assist them in making a claim. There will also be a number of exceptions which may allow backdating beyond the one month limit.

People suffering from mesothelioma will continue to benefit from the removal of the 90-day waiting period for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit and the widening of the range of occupations covered for this disease.

Lone Parents

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the numbers of lone parents who are owner occupiers; and how many such lone parents are in receipt of mortgage interest support. [18085]

Mr. Bradley: The estimated number of lone parents who are owner occupiers is 520,000. The latest available information shows that 97,000 lone parents are in receipt of mortgage interest payments through the benefit system.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of lone parent premium there were in each year since 1990; and how many new claims for lone parent premium were made in each year. [18083]

Mr. Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Lone parent premium recipients in Great Britain May 1990 to February 1997

000s

Enquiry	*One or more listed benefit*	*Income support*	*Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance*	*Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Benefit*
May 1990	900	790	n/a	110
May 1991	980	870	n/a	110
May 1992	1,070	960	n/a	110
May 1993	1,130	1,010	n/a	120
May 1994	1,180	1,040	n/a	140
May 1995	1,210	1,060	n/a	150
May 1996	1,230	1,060	n/a	170
February 1997	1,030	1,020	10	n/a

Notes

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest ten thousand.
2. Income Support sample size: 1 per cent. up to and including 1993, 5 per cent. thereafter.
3. Figures include estimates due to the data collection procedure in Scotland.
4. The information does not include second adult rebate cases.
5. Community Charge Benefit was replaced by Council Tax Benefit from April 1993.
6. Housing benefit/Council Tax Benefit and Community Charge Benefit figures exclude those receiving Income Support, and the overlap between Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.
7. Information is not available on the number of new claims from lone parents made in the same period.

Sources

1. Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry, 1991.
2. Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 1997.
3. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries without Income Support, taken at the end of May in each year given.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she plans to publish the reports comparing the control groups and the control areas for the New Deal for Lone Parents scheme. [20052]

Mr. Bradley: The final report is scheduled for publication in autumn 1999.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if it is the objective of the New Deal for Lone Parents scheme to get lone parents into full-time work; [20039]

(2) how many of the 433 lone parents who have got work through the New Deal for Lone Parents have full-time jobs; and how many are no longer claiming benefits. [20027]

Mr. Bradley: The objective of the New Deal for Lone Parents is to help lone parents on Income Support improve their incomes by assisting them to take up or increase paid work.

We do not expect that all lone parents moving into work will be able to do so on a full-time basis. There will be individuals whose personal circumstances are such that this will not be a viable option. We know, however, that the majority of lone parents want to work, and we expect that their aim will be to move towards financial independence.

Up to the end of November, 864 lone parents had been helped into work through the Government's New Deal for Lone Parents. Although the majority will have moved into work of 16 or more hours per week, information on the hours of work is not yet available in all cases. Of the 655 cases where information is currently available, 568 lone parents had moved into work of 16 or more hours per week. Of this group, 540 are not currently receiving Income Support.

Mortgage Interest Payments

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the mortgage interest rate paid by the Benefits Agency for those on income support. [19351]

Mr. Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Efford) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *856*.

Tax and Benefit Rates

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect on the number of people facing combined marginal withdrawal rates of tax on benefits of *(a)* 100 per cent. or above, *(b)* 90 per cent. or above, *(c)* 80 per cent. or above, *(d)* 70 per cent. or above, *(e)* 60 per cent. or above and *(f)* 50 per cent. or above of cutting the taper on family credit and on housing benefit by 10 per cent., if no other changes were made to the tax and benefit system. [19257]

Mr. Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Marginal tax rate	*Difference in numbers facing high marginal tax rates, following a reduction of 10 per cent. in the family credit and housing benefit tapers*
100+	[1]—
90+	–60,000
80+	–195,000
70+	+45,000
60+	+200,000
50+	+210,000

[1] Denotes less than 2,500.

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000.
2. Figures are calculated for benefit units where at least one partner works 16 hours or more.
3. Figures are based on the 1994–95 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 1996–97 levels of prices and benefit rates.

Disability Payments

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made as to the proportion of those currently receiving disability living allowance who would be eligible for employment options under the New Deal programmes. [19466]

Mr. Denham: The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age, and we are introducing New Deal programmes to help into work the young unemployed; the long-term unemployed; and lone parents. Those Disability Living Allowance recipients who are also receiving Jobseeker's Allowance will have access to the New Deal programmes for the young unemployed and the long-term unemployed, which will both include opportunities for subsidised employment; and Disability

Living Allowance recipients bringing up children on their own will be able to participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Under our New Deal for people with a disability or long-term illness, we have set aside up to £195 million to finance a range of options aimed at helping participants to move into or stay in work. As a first stage we are this week initiating the bidding process under which we will fund a number of innovative schemes. We also plan to introduce personal advisers to help people overcome barriers to work, initially on a modest scale. These initiatives will inform decisions about how best to offer help to all those sick and disabled people who need it. Under this programme Disability Living Allowance recipients who are not in a job would be offered help to move into work; and where necessary those who already had jobs would be offered help to stay in work.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for the future of attendance allowance benefits. [17876]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to creating a modern Social Security system which effectively tackles poverty and welfare dependency, and which provides help where it is most needed. As a first step we are undertaking a comprehensive review of the Department's expenditure. The review is wide-ranging and includes consideration of the complex range of benefits paid to people who are disabled or have health problems. We want to end the exclusion of disabled people; to empower them to play a full part in society, and to develop an approach which focuses on people's abilities and their capacities instead of their disabilities and incapacity.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement as to the planned date of publication of the report on the review of the disability living allowance. [17651]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* We are committed to creating a modern Social Security system which effectively tackles poverty and welfare dependency, and which provides help where it is most needed. As a first step we are undertaking a comprehensive review of the Department's expenditure. The review is wide-ranging and includes consideration of the complex range of benefits paid to people who are disabled or have health problems. We want to end the exclusion of disabled people; to empower them to play a full part in society, and to develop an approach which focuses on people's abilities and their capacities instead of their disabilities and incapacity.

Direct Payments (Fuel)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he proposes to take to ensure that eligible households continue to have access to the fuel direct payment method. [19698]

Mr. Bradley: We have no current plans to change the basis of the direct payments scheme which is available to all claimants receiving Income Support and income based Jobseeker's Allowance who meet the qualifying criteria.

Students

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions the Scottish Office Education Department have had with the Department of Social Security on a common definition of a full-time student; and if he will make a statement. [19759]

Mr. Bradley: No discussions have taken place between the two Departments but any proposals for a common definition of a full-time student for Social Security and student support purposes would be subject to consultation with all interested Departments, including the Scottish Office.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the amount lost to the Government through benefit fraud for the year 1996–97 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland. [19233]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The previous Administration estimated the level of fraud at £4 billion a year. This figure relates to Great Britain as a whole. There is no separate estimate for Scotland.

The Government are currently examining the estimate of fraud in the light of further analysis of the findings of the on-going programme of benefit reviews.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total value in today's figures of the national insurance contributions paid by an employee on *(a)* average industrial earnings, *(b)* twice average industrial earnings and *(c)* three times average industrial earnings in the periods (i) 1967–77, (ii) 1977–87 and (iii) 1987–97. [19915]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested as average industrial earnings data are not available. Information based on the average weekly earnings index for male manual employees produced by the Office of National Statistics is set out in the table.

Total contributions paid at November 1997 prices

Period	*Average earnings* £	*Twice average earnings* £	*Three times average earnings* £
1967–77	6,540.85	7,755.96	7,755.96
1977–87	10,160.22	16,108.92	16,108.92
1987–97	12,476.04	19,877.64	19,877.64

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what uniform rate of employer national insurance contributions would be required on earnings above the lower earning limit to maintain current employer NICs revenues, if employer NICs were to be abolished on the slice of earnings below the LEL. [20992]

Mr. Denham: If this change took effect from April 1998 a single employer contribution rate of 11.6 per cent. would be needed to maintain contribution revenues for 1998–99.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if those aged under 25 years who lose their entitlement to jobseeker's allowance by refusing to take up any of the four options which have been offered to them under the Welfare to Work scheme will also lose their entitlement to any other benefits they are receiving. [20026]

Mr. Bradley: Young people who are sanctioned because they unreasonably refuse to take up one of the four options offered under the New Deal, will lose their Jobseeker's Allowance but retain passported benefits such as Housing and Council Tax Benefit, and other benefits unaffected by the sanction, such as Child Benefit.

Sensory Disabilities

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to increase awareness of existing disability benefits amongst people with sensory disabilities. [20706]

Mr. Denham: Modernising the Social Security System is one of this Government's key priorities. We are committed to ensuring that the benefits system is accessible to all the Department's clients.

The publicity of existing disability benefits is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Riggs to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 15 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security asked Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what plans she has to increase awareness of existing disability benefits amongst people with sensory disabilities. As Mr. Mathison is away from the office on leave, I am replying.

The Benefits Agency aims to ensure that all customers have equality of access to the benefits system. We provide information in alternative formats for people with disabilities, including information for deaf, blind and partially sighted people.

For blind and partially sighted people we currently produce information in braille, large print and on audio cassette. A new edition of FB19, *A guide for blind and partially sighted people—social security benefits,* will be available for customers in January 1998. Also, in April 1998 we will be re-launching our series of videos for deaf people which will be presented using British Sign Language (BSL) and will be subtitled.

These products are produced in consultation with customer representative organisations in order to ensure that they provide the best possible access for customers with specialist needs. We evaluate and develop these products continuously.

The recently announced overhaul of benefits literature will of course encompass material for people with sensory disabilities and consideration of the most appropriate alternative formats.

I hope that you find this reply helpful.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated savings which will arise from the changes to invalidity benefit and the introduction of incapacity benefit in 1998–99. [21096]

Mr. Denham: We estimate the savings in 1998–99 to be £1,830 million.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the people who will receive reduced council tax benefit under the proposed restrictions will be *(a)* renters, *(b)* owner-occupiers with mortgages and *(c)* owner occupiers who own outright. [20991]

Mr. Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. The known tenure of benefit units receiving reduced Council Tax Benefit under the proposed restrictions is set out in the table:

000s

Tenure	*Number affected*
Rented	20
Owner-occupied[1]	25
Not identified[2]	15
Total	65

[1] It is not possible to say how many of these have mortgages, although it includes approximately 10,000 who get help with mortgage interest through Income Support and Jobseekeer's Allowance (income based).
[2] It is likely that the majority of these cases will be owner-occupiers.
1. Information is based on the May 1995 Housing Benefit Management Information System 1 per cent. sample, uprated in line with the forecasts behind the 1997 Departmental Report.
2. Numbers of recipients have been rounded to the nearest 5,000.
3. Total will not sum due to rounding.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Household Growth

9. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of new homes that will need to be built in the Leicestershire countryside to accommodate projections of household growth. [19403]

Mr. Caborn: We have made no such estimate. The number and location of new homes in Leicestershire is primarily a matter for the relevant local authority to consider through the development plan process. My Department has published projections of household growth for counties, but not for areas within them.

Regional Assemblies

10. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for a regional assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside. [19404]

Mr. Caborn: Where there is popular demand in individual English regions, we will legislate for the establishment of a directly elected regional assembly—but that is not for the present Parliament.

In the meantime we will build on the arrangements for regional chambers which are being established by local authorities and others on a voluntary basis.

Parish Councils

11. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the role of parish councils within regional development agencies. [19405]

Mr. Caborn: Regional development agencies will build on the constructive relationships that the Rural Development Commission has established with parish councils and other local bodies.

Green Belt Land

12. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the Government's policy on new building on green belt land. [19406]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's policy on Green Belts is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 2. There remains a presumption against inappropriate development in Green Belts unless there are very special circumstances justifying the development which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

14. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the role of the green belt in encouraging economic activity in inner city areas. [19408]

Mr. Caborn: In 1993 my Department published a research study "The Effectiveness of Green Belts" which highlighted the role of Green Belts in helping urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. Planning Policy Guidance note 2 on Green Belts was revised in 1995 to take account of the research results.

Greenhouse Gases

13. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the contribution of coal-fired power generation to the output of greenhouse gases. [19407]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to "Energy Paper 65", which was published in March 1995. This gives the projections for energy use and energy-related emissions of carbon dioxide for the period 1995 to 2020, and includes projections of power station fuel use and total power station carbon dioxide emissions.

Transport (London)

16. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the proposed Greater London Authority will have powers to invest in London Transport Underground Ltd. [19410.]

Mr. Raynsford: The proposed Greater London Authority, working through the London Transport Authority, will have a duty to produce and deliver an integrated transport strategy for London, which will need to include the Underground. As our Green Paper made clear, the LTA's role should include oversight of the public private partnership for the London Underground which we are urgently developing.

Local Government Finance

17. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in response to the changes in SSA announced in the 1998–99 local government settlement. [19411]

Ms Armstrong: We have received a number of representations from local authorities and others on Standard Spending Assessments.

18. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his review of the mechanisms in respect of local government finance. [19412]

Ms Armstrong: We announced the review of local government finance in July, taking forward our Manifesto commitments, in close collaboration with local government, business and other representative organisations. We will be consulting more widely on possible changes shortly and set out our proposals on Local Government in a White Paper next spring.

21. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in response to the changes in economic and social needs indices announced in the 1998–99 local government settlement. [19416]

23. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in response to the changes in economic and social needs indices announced in the 1998–99 local government settlement. [19418]

Ms Armstrong: We have received a number of representations from local authorities and others in response to the changes in the economic and social needs indices announced in the provisional 1998–99 local government finance settlement.

20. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make a statement on the outcome of his review into the area cost adjustment. [19415]

Mr. Raynsford: We intend to commission further research to examine the specific cost approach to calculating the area cost adjustment element of standard spending assessments.

The research should report in May 1998. We will discuss its findings with the Local Government Association. Decisions will be taken on Standard Spending Assessments for 1999–2000 next autumn.

Permitted Pollutants (Quotas)

19. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to introduce schemes to permit the trading of quotas of permitted pollutants. [19414]

Angela Eagle: The Government are committed to implement the best package of instruments for delivering existing and future environmental policy commitments. These in principle may include the trading of emissions quotas, as well as pollution charges or other instruments. There are no current proposals for the introduction of Emissions Quota Trading.

Thames Gateway Initiative

22. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions which regional development agency will take the lead responsibility for the Thames gateway initiative. [19417]

Mr. Raynsford: The Thames Gateway area will be covered by the Regional Development Agencies for London, the South East and the Eastern Region. It will be for these three Agencies to agree on arrangements for handling issues such as the Thames Gateway, which straddle their boundaries. This will include whether one of the Agencies should take a lead responsibility and, if so, which one should take that role.

Rural Development Commission

24. **Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what will be the role of the Rural Development Commission following the introduction of regional development agencies. [19419]

Mr. Caborn: We are considering this as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. We expect to reach conclusions in the New Year.

Peripheral Areas (Economic Regeneration)

25. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to assist the economic regeneration of peripheral areas of the country. [19420]

Angela Eagle: The Government are committed to pursuing policies that pursue jobs, growth, and competitiveness in a sustainable way that is compatible with protecting the environment and promoting social cohesion. This commitment is put into practice through initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget which supports partnership-led projects which address local needs and priorities. Our proposal to establish regional development agencies in England from 1 April 1999 will ensure that these policies and initiatives are taken forward in a way which takes account of all interests within regions—urban, rural, sub-regional and local.

Kyoto Summit

26. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Kyoto summit on climate change. [19421]

Mr. Prescott: This Government are committed to tackling the threat of climate change. The role we played in securing a deal in Kyoto demonstrated this to the world. I will be making a statement on the outcome of the Kyoto conference straight after these questions.

Personal Social Services

27. **Dr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on social service provision of the change in the level fo the SSA for personal social services. [19422]

Mr. Raynsford: No such assessment has been made, because the impact of any change in the level of the SSA for personal social services depends upon local authorities' decisions on the size and allocation of their budgets.

A3 Hindhead Tunnel

38. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the A3 Hindhead tunnel. [19433]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have received a considerable number of representations about the A3 Hindhead Improvement. We are considering these as part of the Roads review.

Rail Underground Integrated Ticketing

39. **Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to integrate ticket sales between the rail network and London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [19434]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Train operators and London Transport already have joint ticketing initiatives which cover rail, underground and bus services. We are keen to build on this. It is important that London has a properly integrated transport network, including ticketing. That is why our plans for London governance include establishing a Greater London Authority charged with devising and implementing an integrated transport policy.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

40. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he will take to encourage the timeous completion of the channel tunnel rail link. [19435]

Dr. Strang: Under the CTRL Development Agreement, London and Continental Railways are contractually committed to completing the rail link within five and a half years of their securing the main financing of the project.

Rail Infrastructure Projects

41. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage co-operation between Railtrack and train operating companies over infrastructure projects requiring major financial investment. [19436]

Dr. Strang: Railtrack's licence now requires the company to consult train operators more fully on its investment plans. We have given the Franchising Director a remit to secure cost effective investment in the network. We are committed to establishing a new rail authority, with stronger powers to promote investment.

Traffic Calming

42. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to encourage local councils to introduce traffic calming measures. [19437]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Traffic calming is already well established in the UK. it is one of the tools used in

managing traffic better and in improving road safety. Traffic calming has proved to be effective in constraining vehicle speed and in reducing the number and severity of road accidents, particularly in residential areas.

The Department provides local authorities with guidance and advice on traffic calming measures through our Traffic Advisory leaflets and day-to-day technical advice.

Transport Noise

43. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for noise reduction measures on existing roads. [19438]

Dr. Strang: There are several alternative approaches for reducing the noise of traffic on existing roads which need to be considered more fully. Tackling the problem of traffic noise will be an important element in our Integrated Transport policy which will be published as a White Paper next year.

46. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to provide assistance to people who are subject to the effects of transport noise. [19441]

Dr. Strang: The adverse impacts of transport noise are an important concern for Government. There have been significant reductions in the noise from new road vehicles and aircraft, which have led to marked improvements in the noise climate, although in the longer term projections suggest that without further improvements, previous reductions in noise from vehicles would be offset in many areas by traffic growth. We are considering policies on noise as an important strand in the development of our Integrated Transport Policy, on which we will be publishing a White Paper next year.

52. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make provisions in the Highways Agency budget to provide greater soundproofing of existing motorways. [19447]

Dr. Strang: There are several approaches to reducing the noise of traffic on existing roads which need to be considered more fully. Tackling the problem of traffic noise will be an important element in our integrated transport policy which will be published as a White Paper next year.

London Underground

44. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met London Underground management to discuss the future of London Underground. [19439]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions last met the Chairman of London Transport and the Managing Director of London Underground on 3 December.

European State Airline Subsidies

45. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to meet the European Transport Commissioner to discuss subsidies to European state airlines. [19440]

Dr. Strang: I meet Commissioner Kinnock from time to time, when we discuss a range of aviation and other transport issues.

Integrated Transport Strategy

47. **Mr. Prior:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress towards an integrated transport strategy in rural areas. [19442]

Dr. Strang: The question of how best to deliver an integrated transport strategy for rural areas is being given full consideration in our fundamental review of transport policy. Our proposals for implementing that strategy will be set out in the forthcoming transport White Paper.

Rolling Stock

48. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to encourage the purchase of new rolling stock in the privatised railway system. [19443]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Existing franchise agreements already include commitments by franchisees to introduce new rolling stock. However, we want to see even more new rolling stock orders and we expect the rolling stock leasing companies to play a big role in procuring new trains, taking reasonable commercial risks to achieve high levels of investment in the rail industry.

Vehicle Approval Test

49. **Dr. Vis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons the design of American cars failed the new single vehicle type approval test. [19444]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Earlier this year, some American cars failed the pilot single vehicle approval test for various reasons related to at least one of the following—lighting, rear-view mirrors, interior fittings, exterior projections and deep-tinted glazing. However, the recent proposals to relax the SVA requirements and recognise American standards would reduce the reasons to lighting and, for a few cases only, mirrors and exterior projections.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received expressing concern about the introduction of the single vehicle approval test on 1 January 1998; if he will make delay the introduction of the test; and if he will make a statement. [20709]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* We have received nearly 1,600 such representations, the majority of which are pre-printed duplicates. The mandatory aspects of SVA that were due to come into effect on 1 January 1998 for cars originating outside the European Union have for the time being been postponed until 1 May 1998, because the European Commission has instructed us to defer implementing the proposals set out in our recent consultation.

Road Vehicles (Fuel Efficiency)

50. **Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase fuel efficiency in road vehicles. [19445]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are a number of measures in place to increase fuel efficiency, including the 6 per cent. annual fuel duty increases announced by the Chancellor in July, the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force and negotiating with the motor manufacturers a voluntary agreement at European level. We will be considering further measures as part of the new climate change programme we will be developing next year.

National Air Traffic Services

51. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the financing of the National Air Traffic Services. [19446]

Dr. Strang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London on 3 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *63*.

We are considering a range of options for the financing of NATS.

Local Government Employees

Mr. David Steward: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions when the review into the political restrictions affecting local government employees will be completed. [19409]

Ms Armstrong: We intend, in the New Year, to publish for consultation any proposals for change resulting from the review.

Lost Shipping (The Gaul)

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *295*, if he will publish the report from HMS Mohawk dealing with her involvement in the search and rescue operation conducted following the disappearance of The Gaul. [20356]

Ms Glenda Jackson: HMS Mohawk was one of several vessels that took part in the search of the Eastern Greenland and Western Barents Seas between 11 and 14 February 1974. The search was co-ordinated from HMS Hermes and a report of the search was filed on 19 February. A complete narrative of events is included at Annexe A of that report. Both the report and the narrative give details of HMS Mohawk's contribution to the search operation. The report has been retrieved from files held by the Marine Safety Agency and copies of the report and the Annexe have been placed in the Library

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *295*, what the *(a)* contents and *(b)* sources were of the 13 reports received on the possible location of the wreck of The Gaul. [20353]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The positions reported and their sources were:

72°04'N
25°05'E: RAIRO—Norwegian fishing vessel
72°10'N
27°45.5'E: POSEIDON—German support vessel
72°03'N
25°04'E: MARBELLA—UK fishing vessel
72°13'N:
23°40'E: ELLA HEWITT—UK fishing vessel
72°N
25°E: SWANELLA—UK fishing vessel
71°20'N
28°25'E: ROVER—UK fishing vessel
70°40'N
16°54'E: Unnamed Soviet merchant vessel
71°43'N
27°07'E: ROSS CANAVERAL—UK fishing vessel
71°20'N:
28°25': Norwegian Maritime Authority
72°13'N
24°20'E: MHS RHYL—Royal Navy vessel
71°37'N
29°50'E: LORD NELSON—UK fishing vessel
71°30'N
27°00'E: ST. ROMAN—UK merchant vessel
72°10'N
27°45'E: Norwegian Coastguard Search and Rescue Report.

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *296*, what was the cost of each proposal received to search for the wreck of The Gaul. [20357]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Five proposals were received in the two years following the loss of The Gaul. Their cost estimates ranged from £15,000 to £100,000.

Rail Staff (Redundancies)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many staff employed by *(a)* the British Railways Board and *(b)* its successor companies, have been made redundant during each of the last 10 years. [20469]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand from the British Railways Board that, in each year from 1987–88 to 1996–97, the following numbers of British Rail staff were made redundant:

Year	*Number of staff*
1987–88	2,000 (approx.)
1988–89	2,200 (approx.)
1989–90	1,700 (approx.)
1990–91	850 (approx.)
1991–92	800 (approx.)
1992–93	8,500 (approx.)
1993–94	8,000 (approx.)
1994–95	6,322
1995–96	3,568
1996–97	1,700 (approx.)

Equivalent information for BR successor companies is not available and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Rail Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on public safety of the changed rules for testing the maintenance and operation of the signalling system recently introduced by Railtrack. [20402]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that Railtrack's rules and procedures for signalling works testing are set out in mandatory Railway Group Standards. These published engineering standards are amended as necessary from time to time. The safe maintenance and testing of railway signalling is a matter for Railtrack, unless there is reason to believe that their systems are deficient. The Health and Safety Executive has informed me that Railtrack's overall performance in terms of signalling safety demonstrates a high standard, and that it has no reasons at present for major concerns on this subject.

Railways (Station Staff)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many staff were employed on station duties involving direct contact with the public *(a)* by each of the British Rail train operating units during their final year of operation and *(b)* by each of the franchised train operating companies in the latest year for which figures are available. [20471]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is not available centrally. British Rail did not maintain records of numbers of staff employed on station duties involving direct contact with the public. Any such figures relating to franchised train operators are an operational matter for them.

Swale Crossing

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the need for the second Swale crossing; and if he will make a statement. [20352]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have received a considerable number of representations on the need for the second Swale crossing, which would be provided by the A249 Iwade–Queensborough Improvement scheme. Most of the representations express strong support for the scheme. We are currently considering all representations as part of the Roads Review consultation.

Ministerial Visit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his recent visit to India. [20940]

Mr. Prescott: I briefly visited India on 20 November as part of a series of round-the-world meetings I had in the build-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Kyoto. In India, I met Prime Minister Gujral and Professor Soz, Minster for the Environment and Forests and had useful discussions with them about climate change and transport matters. We were able to work closely with the Indian delegation and other developing countries in the subsequent Kyoto Conference.

Property Transfer Rules

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to complete his Department's review of property transfer rules and house purchase practices. [21022]

Ms Armstrong: Following a successful pilot study, the main stage of a wide-ranging study to track house sales and purchases will commence in January. I expect to be in a position to announce the results of the study next autumn.

Departmental Wages

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many full-time employees in his Department are paid at an hourly rate of *(a)* £3.17, *(b)* between £3.17 and £3.50, *(c)* between £3.51 and £3.75 and *(d)* between £3.76 and £4. [20604]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The number of staff earning these hourly rates is as follows:

(a) £3.17 an hour: 30

(b) between £3.17 and £3.50: 801

(c) between £3.51 and £3.75: 138

(d) between £3.76 and £4.00: 65.

Road Schemes

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which of the previous Government's road building schemes have been subjected to cost benefit analysis in the course of his Department's Roads Review. [20558]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* During their development, all of the previous Government's road building schemes have been subjected to cost benefit analysis. No new information has been collected in the course of the current Roads Review which would enable a new cost benefit analysis to be carried out. Existing information is being reassessed in the light of the five fundamental criteria (accessibility, safety, economy, the environment and integration) identified in the Roads Review consultation paper "What Role for Trunk Roads in England?"

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the guidelines which the Highways Agency follows in determining whether or not it conducts a cost benefit analysis for new road schemes; and what changes he has made to these guidelines since 1 May. [20559]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The Highways Agency carries out a formal cost benefit analysis using the computer program COBA (or, in certain circumstances, URECA) for all new road schemes costing more than £1 million. Schemes costing less than that amount are also subject to economic appraisal conforming to the same economic principles and using the same economic parameters, but may employ less

sophisticated methods. No changes have been made to these guidelines since 1 May. A new road assessment methodology is being considered as part of our strategic Roads Review.

London Government

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out his proposals on the London referendum campaign; if he will make a statement on the costs of *(a)* his Department's White Paper and *(b)* publicity campaigns in respect of the referendum; and if he will list the other costs to public funds incurred to date in respect of the proposals. [20409]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* It is our intention that the London referendum campaign should inform Londoners of what it is they will be voting on and encourage them to use their vote. The early part of the campaign will highlight, in particular, the availability of votes by post or proxy. The campaign will be factual and neutral. The Government will not provide any state aid to campaigns either for or against the proposal.

The budget allocation for the White Paper is £350,000, which includes the cost of distributing a summary leaflet to every household in London, translating the leaflet in eight languages in addition to English, and producing versions of the leaflet in braille, large print and audio cassette formats.

The total budget allocation for the referendum publicity campaign, including back-up services, is £950,000.

Expenditure incurred to date in respect of our proposals for the Greater London Authority totals an estimated £204,500. This includes £75,000 on the Green Paper and associated summary leaflet, £16,000 on other research, £13,500 on factfinding trips to America, Germany and Spain and approximately £100,000 on departmental staff costs.

Trunk Roads (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will conduct a review of the siting of verge safety fencing on trunk roads in Staffordshire. [20556]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency to reply to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 16 December 1997:

Glenda Jackson has asked me to reply to your recent question about conducting a review of the siting of verge safety fencing on trunk roads in Staffordshire.

A review of verge safety fencing was already commissioned and we expect a report from our agents, Staffordshire County Council, in the early part of next year. As soon as we have had an opportunity to consider the recommendations I will write to you again to keep you informed.

You may also be interested to learn that our programme for installing central reserve safety fencing on existing trunk roads is progressing well. Currently two further schemes are being installed in Staffordshire this financial year. One, on the A38 between Weeford and Bassett's Pole and the other along the A34 between Walton and Darlaston.

I hope this is helpful.

Outdoor Advertising Sites

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the Exchequer of the avoidance of the payment of business rates on outdoor advertising sites; and if he will make a statement. [20715]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has no information on which to make such an estimate. All property liable for non-domestic rates is to be entered on rating lists, the maintenance of which is the statutory duty of the Valuation Office.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he was notified that plutonium was being shipped from Sellafield in roll-on roll-off ferries; how many shipments and how much plutonium has been carried since October 1996; how much plutonium and how many shipments are planned in the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [20289]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The then Department of Transport was notified of such a shipment in June 1996: a single shipment has since taken place, in October 1996, containing 83 kg of plutonium as non-irradiated mixed oxide fuel. Details of future plans are a commercial matter for BNFL.

Local Authority Pensions

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of his proposals in the local government settlement on local authority pension provision. [19399]

Mr. Raynsford: This year's Local Government Finance Settlement took full account of the pension liability of local authorities.

Driving Licences

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many driving licence holders have had their licences revoked under section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 in each of the past five years. [21232]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of driving licences revoked on medical grounds for each of the last five years is as follows. The figures relate to great Britain (separate figures for Scotland are not available).

1992: 11,072

1993: 9,246

1994: 9,637

1995: 11,025

1996: 11,127

1997: 11,273 (to date).

Mr. Browne: To ask the secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many persons applying for a driving licence have had a licence refused under section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 in each of the past five years. [21234]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of driving licences refused on medical grounds for each of the last five years is as follows. The figures relate to Great Britain—separate figures for Scotland are not available.

1992: 7,450
1993: 5,928
1994: 5,911
1995: 5,602
1996: 6,365
1997: 6,381 (to date).

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many driving licence holders who have had their licences revoked under section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 have appealed under section 100 against the revocation of a licence in each of the last five years; [21233]

(2) how many persons who have applied for a driving licence and have had a licence refused under section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 have appealed under section 100 against the refusal of a licence in each of the past five years. [21235]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is not kept separately for licences which are refused and revoked. The total figures are as follows (figures in brackets relate to Scotland).

1994: 22 (2)
1995: 39 (5)
1996: 57 (19)
1997: 47 (10) (to November).

Figures for previous years are not available.

Departmental Spending Plans

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he intends to make any changes to the 1998–99 departmental spending plans for which he is responsible. [21373]

Mr. Prescott: The Government are currently in the middle of their Comprehensive Spending Review. We are also working hard on developing an integrated transport strategy, the conclusions of which will be published in a White Paper next Spring.

The Government are committed to retaining public expenditure next year within the overall planned spending limits and some tough decisions have had to be made. Within my Department's total spending ceiling, however, I shall be making some changes. In particular, I shall make some extra resources available for health and safety and environment protection, and make sure that we derive the best possible value from transport expenditure. With the latter in mind, I shall be increasing 1998–99 provision for trunk roads maintenance compared with provision this year to prevent further wasteful deterioration and for grant aimed at taking freight off the roads.

Spending plans for 1998–99 (expressed in £ millions) across my programmes can be summarised as follows:

Programme	*1995–96 outturn*	*1996–97 estimated outturn*	*1997–98 plans*	*1998–99 plans*
Housing and construction	6,638	[1]5,939	[1]5,118	5,529
Regeneration	1,351	1,374	1,397	1,206
Environment Protection	361	377	363	[2]354
Countryside	127	126	125	123
Non-AEF Local Government[3]	309	226	378	482
Motorways and trunk roads	1,760	1,573	1,491	1,352
London Transport[4]	903	918	651	300
Croydon Tramlink	0	25	50	40
Civil Aviation Authority	34	–13	–34	–40
Railways[5]	501	1,010	1,846	1,774
Other transport services grant[6]	991	876	795	684
Other DETR[7]	836	901	785	763
Total DETR[8]	13,812	13,330	12,964	12,565
Ordnance Survey	13	12	7	4
Office of Water Services	9	19	10	10
Office of Rail Regulator	9	8	9	9

[1] This line is reduced to reflect receipts from the sale of the Housing Corporation's loans portfolio of £500 million in 1996–97 and £652 million in 1997–98.

[2] Includes technical adjustments to the Environment Agency's baseline amounting to £2.4 million and a transfer of £2 million from Administration for RIMNET (Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network).

[3] The Department's spending on local government outside of Aggregate External Finance.

[4] 1997–98 figure includes £2 million for Channel Tunnel Rail Link related works but excludes £58 million carried forward from previous years. 1998–99 figure excludes funding for CTRL related works (which has been transferred to the Railways line).

[5] Includes some privatisation effects (receipts from sale of businesses—other than Railtrack—less profits lost when businesses are sold). In particular, for 1997–98 and 1998–99, includes deferred ROSCO (rolling stock company) receipts of £43 million and £26 million.

[6] Includes expenditure on local transport.

[7] Includes administration costs and Health and Safety Executive.

[8] Roundings may mean totals do not quite sum. 1998–99 total reflects a £10 million transfer to the Home Office and the surrender to the Exchequer of £10 million which is no longer required because Housing Revenue Account Subsidy debt commutation will not now take place.

Full details of these plans will be set out in the 1998 Departmental Annual Report which is expected to be published in March.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to make an announcement about the distribution to local authorities of capital resources for housing for 1998–99. [21374]

Ms Armstrong: We are committed to providing good quality homes for everyone and today I am pleased to announce a package of funding that will help local authorities provide new homes with registered social landlords, improve the housing stock and help reinvigorate communities.

Councils will receive Housing Investment Programme allocations totalling nearly £770 million for 1998–99. There is £544 million for general purpose allocations, or housing "Annual Capital Guidelines", £166 million for private sector renewal and £59 million for disabled facilities grants.

In addition to Housing Investment Programme allocations, councils will receive allocations under the Capital Receipts Initiative of nearly £570 million. These have been allocated two-thirds in accordance with assessed need and one third in accordance with the total of eligible set-aside receipts generated by each authority between 1 April 1990 and 31 March 1997. These much needed resources will begin to redress years of under-investment in housing.

We have made changes in the way that the HIP resources are allocated by moving away from a fully competitive system to a system which places greater emphasis on need. The HIP allocation has therefore been made half on the basis of need and half on the basis of Ministerial discretion, which takes into account the assessment of each authority's efficiency and effectiveness in meeting housing need in their area.

In addition we are releasing, for the first time, the Government's assessment of all authorities' performance relative to other authorities in the same region. Four factors are assessed: housing strategies, programme delivery, housing management and tenant involvement. Each authority has then been placed in one of four performance bands. Publishing performance bands will encourage authorities to improve their performance, particularly those which are below average.

I am depositing tables in the Library of the House showing each authority's performance band, Annual Capital Guideline, allocations for private sector renewal and disabled facilities grant and allocation under the Capital Receipts Initiative for 1998–99.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the annual production of nuclear waste at *(a)* Rosyth dockyard, *(b)* Devonport dockyard and *(c)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston, for each year from 1986 to date, broken down by category of waste; and how much of each category of waste is presently held at each site. [19783]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The annual figures for the production of nuclear waste at the Atomic WeaponsEstablishment (AWE) Aldermaston for the years 1986 to date, and the current holding, are set out as follows:

AWE Aldermaston

Year	Low level waste Solids (m^3)	Intermediate level waste Solids (m^3)
1986	3,776	162
1987	1,910	219
1988	824	230
1989	1,350	152
1990	1,775	103
1991	1,512	154
1992	1,594	141
1993	2,205	71
1994	1,676	36
1995	1,626	41
1996	1,728	78
Current holdings on site	487	2,549

The date for Rosyth and Devonport Royal Dockyards is maintained by the companies that now own the Dockyards, as required under the terms of their nuclear site licences.

For Low Level Waste, the figures available from 1986 to date, and shown in the table, are based on the volume of waste disposed of, not the volume of waste produced, but a close relationship between the two may be assumed. Current holdings of Low Level Waste are also shown.

Royal Dockyards—Low level waste (Solids)

Year	Rosyth (m^3)	Devonport (m^3)
1986	130	Not held
1987	192	211
1988	116	40
1989	76	72
1990	171	108
1991	38	54
1992	53	86
1993	31	20
1994	127	75
1995	96	126
1996	154	40
Current holdings on site (estimated)	31	27

For Intermediate Level Waste, the production figures are not readily available in this form as they do not have to be recorded year on year. Intermediate Level Waste holdings change as new waste is produced, and as accumulated waste undergoes radioactive decay until it changes into Low Level Waste and can be disposed of. There is no straightforward correlation between holding and production figures. Current holdings of Intermediate Level Waste are as follows:

Royal Dockyards—Intermediate level waste (Solids)

Year	Rosyth (m^3)	Devonport (m^3)
Current holdings on site (estimated)	20	25

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines are currently awaiting disposal; where they are presently located; and what estimate he has made of the amount of nuclear material present in each submarine, separated into high, intermediate and low. [19786]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* There are 11 decommissioned nuclear powered submarines awaiting disposal. The location of each is as follows:

	Location
Dreadnought	Rosyth
Churchill	Rosyth
Swiftsure	Rosyth
Revenge	Rosyth
Resolution	Rosyth
Warspite	Devonport
Conqueror	Devonport
Courageous	Devonport
Valiant	Devonport
Renown	Rosyth
Repulse	Rosyth

Two of these submarines (Renown and Repulse) are to undergo defuelling, prior to interim storage afloat pending disposal. These are the only submarines which contain high level waste in the form of the spent fuel cores. I am withholding information about the exact amount of high level material contained within the submarines under exemptions 1a–c of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Immediately after the defuelling process there are 75 tonnes of intermediate level material and 140 tonnes of low level material, which will decay in time, in each submarine. Within the intermediate level material there is a mix of long life and short life material, decaying at different rates, and it is not possible to estimate readily the tonnages of radioactive material on individual submarines at this time. During storage afloat, the submarines are regularly monitored and maintained to ensure that they pose no health hazard to dockyard workers or the public.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19306]

Mr. George Robertson: My Department currently employs two Special Advisers. Details of remuneration are withheld under exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. They were included in the answer given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the questions from the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*. No MOD Task Forces have been established. My Department has set up one high-level review since 1 May: the Strategic Defence Review. In this context, I have established a panel of 18 experts to provide me with advice. Panel members are unpaid, but may claim expenses.

Vanguard Submarines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the advantages of modifying Vanguard class submarines to take vertically launched conventionally armed land attack missiles; [20083]

(2) what assessment he has made of the advantages of fitting Vanguard submarines with conventionally armed land-attack missiles launched through torpedo tubes. [20085]

Dr. Reid: No such assessments have been made.

Bosnia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the budget for booking entertainers on behalf of the armed forces to perform in Bosnia in 1997–98. [20630]

Dr. Reid: The forecast cost of the entertainers booked to perform for British forces participating in the NATO-led Stabilisation Force in former Yugoslavia during financial year 1997–98 is £225,600.

Chinese Government (Visits)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what visits to the United Kingdom by Chinese Government defence officials are planned. [20700]

Mr. George Robertson: A Chinese Army officer is due to attend the Royal College of Defence Studies course starting in January 1998. To date there are no other firm plans for Chinese Government defence officials to visit the UK in 1998, but invitations have been issued to the head of the Chinese Defence Research and Technology Bureau and the Chief of the Chinese Navy.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the British military presence in the Falkland Islands is excluded from the Strategic Defence Review. [21203]

Mr. George Robertson: The Government are committed to sustaining the right of the Falkland Islanders to determine their own future. In the Strategic Defence Review, appropriate provision will be made fully to discharge defence responsibilities in respect of the Falkland Islands.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the tours of duty undertaken by members of the General Service Battalion since 1994 and those planned for the next two years indicating the numbers involved. [20322]

Dr. Reid: In 1994 the First Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment was stationed in Cyprus as a resident battalion, the manning requirement for which was 539 officers and men. It returned to the United Kingdom in May 1995 and converted to its current primary role of a mechanised infantry battalion with a manning requirement of 625 officers and men. Since then the battalion has completed one six month operational tour in Northern Ireland from December 1995 to June 1996 and on 15 December 1997 it deployed on another such tour, also in Northern Ireland. In both cases the minimum manning strength required is 510 officers and men. On current plans, the battalion is unlikely to be deployed on another operational tour in the next two years.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the duties of part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service battalions. [20324]

Dr. Reid: The duties of the Part-Time element of the Home Service are exactly the same of those of the Full-Time element and include foot and vehicle patrols, vehicle checkpoints, helicopter-borne operation, searches and static guard duties.

The Part-Time soldiers of the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service form an important and integral part of the Army in Northern Ireland. The Part-time element supplements the Full Time companies, particularly at nights and weekends and, depending on the security situation, can also provide an enhanced operational capability or operational reserve.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the total salary costs for part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment in the last year for which figures are available. [20326]

Dr. Reid: The total salary costs for part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service from 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997 were approximately £13,660,000.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *321*, what were the total staffing levels of the Royal Irish Regiment in December 1997 (i) in total and (ii) broken down (1) into numbers of full-time and part-time, (2) by gender, (3) by perceived religious or community origin of each gender and (4) battalion. [20328]

Dr. Reid: As explained in my answer of 6 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *324*, this information will not be available until early next year. I will write to my hon. Friend when the figures are available.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment are otherwise *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed; and if he will estimate the numbers of part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment falling into each standard occupational category in their civilian roles. [20327]

Dr. Reid: As at 1 December 1997, the number of Royal Irish Regiment Home Service part-time soldiers was approximately 1,870, of whom my Department estimate some 1,520 are otherwise employed and 350 are otherwise unemployed.

Estimates of the numbers of part-time members falling into each standard occupational category in their civilian roles are as follows:

	Number
Managers and Administrators	115
Professional Occupations	50
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	75
Clerical and Secretarial Occupations	60
Crafts and Skilled Manual Occupations	375
Personal and Protective Service Occupations	30
Sales Occupations	90
Plant and Machine Operatives	340
Other Occupations	385

Province Reserve and Rural Reinforcement Battalions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 6 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *324*, what was the overall strength in September *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997 of the Province Reserve Battalion and the Rural Reinforcement Battalion broken down into numbers fully committed to Northern Ireland and the numbers actually deployed there. [20305]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is set out as follows:

	Committed	*Deployed*
1995		
Province Reserve Battalion (PRB)	638	138
Rural Reinforcement Battalion (RRB) (1)	—	—
1996		
PRB	651	216
RRB	419	419
1997		
PRB	599	147
RRB	496	136

Figures as at 30 September. The Rural Reinforcement Battalion did not exist in 1995. At 30 September 1995, its predecessor, the Fermanagh Roulement Battalion (comprising 583 personnel) was fully committed and deployed in the Province.

Patrols

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many patrols were carried out by each battalion stationed in Northern Ireland in the last month for which figures are available broken down by parliamentary constituency or other convenient geographical division. [20306]

Dr. Reid: The information requested for the period 10 November to 8 December (inclusive) is set out as follows, broken down by Police Division and approximate corresponding district council constituencies:

Battalion	*Number of patrols*	*Police division*	*Approximate district council constituencies*
3rd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	96	J	Craigavon, Lisburn, Banbridge
4th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	230	L	Fermanagh
5th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	24	O	Magherafelt, Limavady, Coleraine, Moyle, Ballymoney
7th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	0	A and E	Belfast, North Down, Castlereagh
8th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment[1]	233	H	Armagh
9th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	50	D and B	Lisburn, Antrim
1st Battalion Grenadier Guards	104	G	Down, Ards, Newry and Mourne
1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	28	N	Derry, Strabane
1st Battalion The Queen's Lancashire Regiment[2]	165	L	Omagh, Dungannon, Fermanagh
2nd Battalion The Light Infantry	125	D	Carrickfergus, Newtonabbey
1st Battalion The Cheshire Regiment	54	N	Derry, Strabane
1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment	169	K	Cookstown, Dungannon
1st Battalion The King's Own Scottish Borderers[3]	333	H	Armagh, Newry and Mourne
1st Battalion the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment[4]	195	B	Belfast
3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment[5]	0	D	Carrickfergus, Newtonabbey

A patrol is defined as any foot or mobile patrol in support of the RUC, regardless of size or duration.
Patrols conducted by the Army for local security around bases are not included.
Some battalions operate in more than one Police Division.

Notes

[1] Includes the Queen's Royal Hussars whose squadrons support other battalions in three infantry Brigade's area.
[2] Includes one company of the Rural Reinforcement Battalion, currently the 1st Battalion The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire.
[3] Includes one company of the Province Reserve Battalion, currently the 1st Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.
[4] Took over from the 1st Battalion the Royal Highland Fusiliers on 15 November 1997.
[5] Relocated to the Maze on 27 October and then subsequently to the mainland on 21 November. (One company remained in Province as the Prison Guard Force). The 2nd Battalion the Light Infantry have taken over its area of operations.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 December 1997

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Marriage

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research his Department is undertaking into marriage. [20141]

Mr. Hoon: The Department has commissioned two research projects on marriage which began in April 1997. The first, which looks at individuals' views of marriage over two generations, is being undertaken by Professor Jane Lewis of All Souls College, Oxford and will be completed in March 1999. The second, by One plus One, is the preparation of a series of review papers on the causes, and ways of preventing, marital breakdown. This is due to be completed in March 1998.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria will be applied in *(a)* assessing the success and value for money of the 13 projects being financed in 1997–98 in support of marriage and *(b)* determining whether to renew funding for 1998–99 and beyond for each project. [20142]

Mr. Hoon: The aims of the programme are (i) to identify the types of service which support marriage most effectively; (ii) to increase public awareness of marriage support services; and (iii) to improve access to existing services. The Department will assess the effectiveness of each project in terms of the achievement of its specific aims and objectives and its cost effectiveness.

Whether or not the Department decides to continue funding any of the projects will depend on the results of evaluation and the availability of further resources.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many justices of the peace there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales. [20303]

Mr. Hoon: As at 1 January 1997, the number of Justices of the Peace in England and Wales was as follows:

(a) England: 28,324

(b) Wales: 2,050.

Legal Aid

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will publish his analysis of means testing to determine eligibility for legal aid in the Youth Court when the analysis is completed. [20293]

Mr. Hoon: I will place a summary of the findings of the analysis and of the conclusions in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the appointments to the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [21802]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to announce four new appointments to the Committee on Standards in Public Life: Sir Anthony Cleaver, Lord Goodhart, Mrs. Frances Heaton and the right hon. John MacGregor. I have consulted the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) before making those appointments.

The following existing members of the Committee have been reappointed for a second term: Sir Clifford Boulton, Professor Anthony King, the right hon. The Lord Shore of Stepney, Sir William Utting and Ms Diana Warwick.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank Lord Nolan and those members of the Committee who are leaving after serving their three-year term: Sir Martin Jacomb; the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King); the right hon. The Lord Thomson of Monifieth and Dame Anne Warburton. I am grateful for the valuable work they and other members of the Committee have undertaken over the last three years. The Government intend to build on the excellent work they started, with the help of Lord Neill and the new Committee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

"Getting to Grips with Crime"

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to "Getting to Grips with Crime: A New Framework for Local Action" were received during the consultation period; and if he will make a statement. [21557]

Mr. Straw: Some 545 responses were received, most of them warmly supportive of the Government's proposals. A summary of the main points raised can be found in the Library.

Community Safety Orders

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to the consultation paper "Community Safety Orders" were received during the consultation period; and if he will make a statement. [21488]

Mr. Straw: Some 185 responses were received. A list of the respondents and a summary of the main points raised can be found in the Library in a document entitled "Responses to the Home Office Consultation Document on Community Safety Orders".

Departmental Recruitment

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information on recruitment his Department is required to publish; and if he will make this information available for the Home Office for 1996. [21619]

Mr. Straw: The Civil Service Order in Council 1995 authorises the Civil Service Commissioners to require Departments and agencies to publish summary information about their recruitment and the use of permitted exceptions to the principles of fair and open competition and selection on merit.

The number of staff recruited to the central Home Office, including outstations, during 1996 is shown in the following tables. There were two permitted exceptions to fair and open competition and selection on merit in 1996 and this information was published in the Home Office Annual Report 1997.

Central Home Office (including the Immigration and Nationality Department)

	Number of appointments	Number of women appointed	Number appointed from ethnic minorities	Number of disabled staff appointed
Senior Civil Service[1]	3	0	0	0
Non-industrial grades	388	211	68	14
Industrial grades	3	1	[2]—	0

[1] All recruitment to the Senior Civil Service throughout the Home Office is carried out by the Central Personnel Management Unit.
[2] Below five.

Prison Service[1]

	Number of appointments	Number of women appointed	Number appointed from ethnic minorities	Number of disabled staff appointed
Non-industrial grades	2,246	915	94	7
Industrial grades	191	38	[2]—	1

[1] As the Prison Service is in the process of transferring over to a new computerised personnel system, there may be inaccuracies in the information provided.
[2] Below 5.

Passport Agency

	Number of appointments	Number of women appointed	Number appointed from ethnic minorities	Number of disabled staff appointed
Non-industrial grades	297	209	15	0
Industrial grades	0	0	0	0

Fire Service College

	Number of appointments	Number of women appointed	Number appointed from ethnic minorities	Number of disabled staff appointed
Non-industrial grades	32	22	0	1
Industrial grades	1	0	0	0

Forensic Science Service recruitment

	Number of appointments	Number of women appointed	Number appointed from ethnic minorities	Number of disabled staff appointed
Non-industrial grades	186	103	29	3
Industrial grades	0	0	0	0

"In Excelsis"

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors underlie his Department's retention of the manuscript of "In Excelsis" containing writings by Lord Alfred Douglas. [21334]

Mr. Straw: The manuscript of the poem "In Excelsis" is contained in a notebook which was issued by the Governor of Wormwood Scrubs prison to Lord Alfred Douglas while he was in custody there in 1924. The notebook was then, and is now, owned by the Crown. It has not been retained by my Department, but is held at the Public Record Office at Kew, where it is open for public inspection.

EU Convention (Criminal Matters)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure there is parliamentary scrutiny of proposals in respect of the EU Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. [21335]

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), deposited the draft convention for scrutiny on 24 July and made a revised text available on 1 December. She will today give oral evidence about the draft convention to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities (Sub-Committee E).

Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the nationalities of the people at present being held in the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre; [20590]

(2) if he will list the periods of time that the people at present detained at the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre have been held in detention either at this establishment or at other establishments while their cases are being considered; [20591]

(3) how many people were detained at the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre on 1 December. [20589]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A total of 91 persons were detained at Harmondsworth immigration detention centre as at 1 December 1997.

Information on the duration of current continuous detention, solely under Immigration Act powers, of those persons detained at Harmondsworth immigration detention centre as at 10 December 1997, the latest available date, is given in table 1. Reliable information

about previous periods of detention, if any, of those persons can be obtained only through examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

The nationalities of those persons detained at Harmondsworth immigration detention centre as at 10 December 1997, the latest available date, are given in table 2.

Table 1: Length of continuous detention, solely under Immigration Act powers, of persons detained at Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre as at 10 December 1997[1]

Length of current detention	*Number of detainees*
0–1 month	44
1–2 months	17
2–6 months	20
6–12 months	10
Total	91

[1] Figures represent continuous detention, solely under Immigration Act powers, and may include detention at other locations prior to 10 December 1997.

Table 2: Nationalities of persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers at Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre as at 10 December 1997

Nationalities	*Number of detainees*
Algeria	5
Angola	2
Bangladesh	2
Bulgaria	2
Cyprus	3
Czech Republic[1]	3
Democratic Republic of Congo[2]	2
Gambia	2
Ghana	3
India	10
Ivory Coast	2
Jamaica	2
Lebanon	2
Lithuania	2
Morocco	2
Nigeria	18
Pakistan	7
Romania	4
Turkey	2
Nationality doubtful	3
Other	13
Total	91

[1] May include persons holding documents issued by the former Czechoslovakia.
[2] Formerly Zaire.

Rape

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the conviction rate and clear up rate for rape cases expressed as a percentage and in total in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [20593]

Mr. Michael: The Government are very concerned about the low proportion of reported rapes that result in a conviction. The Research and Statistics Directorate in the Home Office is undertaking a study to discover what factors influence whether or not a recorded rape leads to a conviction for rape and whether such factors have changed since a similar study of 1985 cases. I am today placing in the Library copies of an interim report on the processing of rape cases in the criminal justice system. The interim report provides some useful information on where reported rape cases drop out before they reach court. We now need to know precisely why so many cases fail to result in a conviction. This will be covered in the final report, which should be available in the second half of next year.

My right hon. Friend has already announced a number of wide-ranging reforms to make the criminal justice system more swift and effective. In July, he also set up an inter-departmental working group to look at further ways of assisting vulnerable witnesses, including rape victims, which is due to report shortly.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the length of time taken to process applications for British citizenship. [20460]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Working practices and organisation in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate are currently being looked at internally in order to improve the service to applicants. Next year, the introduction of the Caseworking Programme in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will produce efficiency savings which will speed up the processing of these applications.

Misuse of Drugs Act

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conditions would have to be satisfied for a drug classified as Schedule 1 in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to be reclassified as Schedule 2. [20627]

Mr. George Howarth: The Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1985 allow and govern activities in relation to controlled drugs which would otherwise be unlawful under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. They divide those drugs into five schedules, with those in Schedule 1 being subject to the most stringent controls.

The drugs in Schedule 1 are generally acknowledged to have no therapeutic applications and their use is accordingly confined by international convention and domestic law to research and other special purposes.

Reclassification from Schedule 1 to Schedule 2 would depend upon the therapeutic benefits of a medicinal form of the drug being satisfactorily demonstrated in the United Kingdom, or the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs reducing the international controls on the drug.

Children

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been found not guilty as a result of the operation of the presumption of doli incapax in each year for the last 10 years. [19814]

Mr. Michael: This information is not collected centrally. However a not guilty outcome as a result of the presumption of doli incapax is neither in the interests of the child or children concerned nor in the interests of the public. It is clearly important that the court is not prevented from dealing with the youngster when there is no doubt about the facts of the case.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Concessionary Fuel

Yvette Cooper: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements she has made to ensure the continued supply of concessionary fuel to ex-employees of British Coal. [21817]

Mr. Battle: My Department took over liability to supply concessionary fuel to ex-employees of British Coal in March 1995. Contracts were placed then with two companies to supply and deliver concessionary fuel over the period from March 1995 up to March 1998.

Following a competitive tender, two-year contracts have recently been awarded to T. H. Fergusson Ltd. in Scotland and Coal Products Distribution Ltd. in England and Wales, to take effect from 30 March 1998. Both companies already supply and deliver solid fuel to other domestic customers.

All fuel supplied will continue to be of high quality and approved for use by HETAS, the solid fuel industry's Heating and Testing Approvals Scheme.

My Department's agents, the National Concessionary Fuel Office (NCFO), will continue to administer the concessionary fuel service, handling all inquiries and claims about entitlements from the beneficiaries.

Because European law on public procurement requires one manufacturer not to be favoured over another, and because fuel prices have changed in relation to each other and the mix of fuels bid into the tender is different from the last tender, it will be necessary to revise the entitlement levels for some brands of manufactured smokeless fuels to ensure that cost of supplying fuel to each beneficiary is equivalent. Higher prices for some brands means this rebalancing will reduce annual entitlements from present levels for those beneficiaries who receive those brands. However, all beneficiaries will have the opportunity either to remain with those brands or to switch to broadly equivalent fuels which will generally provide the same or higher entitlements. Anyone switching to a cheaper brand will receive more than they receive at present.

No-one need change from the fuel they receive now. No-one will be made to change, everyone will be able to make their own decision. Fuller details are being provided to the mining unions this month and to the recipients of concessionary fuel early in the New Year so that they can make their wishes known and stocks can be ordered.

Laser Pens

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she will take to ensure that class 1 and 2 laser pens are not sold to children under the age of 18 years. [20487]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Consumer Protection Act 1987 contains a power to make regulations prohibiting the supply of goods to particular classes of people; for example to children under the age of 18 if the goods would be unsafe in the hands of those people. However, to do this we would require clear evidence that there was a safety problem arising from the sale of Class 1 or Class 2 laser pointers to children under 18 years. To date there is no such evidence since all incidents appear to involve Class 3 lasers and above.

On 28 October I acted swiftly in urging Trading Standards Departments to remove from general sale all Class 3 and Class 4 laser pointers as specified under BS EN 60825–Part 1: 1994 (Safety of laser products), because these pointers present an unacceptable risk to consumers. I have been advised by the National Radiological Protection Board that there is no evidence that laser pointers in Class 1 or Class 2 of the BS EN standard can cause a direct risk to health.

Space Programme

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will examine the case for supporting the heat exchanger recently invented by Bristol University within the Government's space programme. [21128]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Innovative research into heat exchangers has been underway at the University of Bristol in recent years and is known to my officials at the British National Space Centre. I am advised that there is a possible application of this research in the field of space transportation.

I can confirm that BNSC will consider the merits of this research as part of an ongoing reappraisal of the prospects for our satellite industry to retain cost effective access to space.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the advantages and disadvantages of exempting disabled people from her minimum wage legislation. [20901]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The National Minimum Wage Bill does not treat disabled people differently from the able bodied.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what impact the proposed changes to corporation tax will have on forecast net returns on capital in each of the next four years. [20879]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Overall, the changes will have little impact on companies' post tax profits, which are of course computed on an accruals basis rather than by reference to cash flow. No company will pay more corporation tax in total as a result of the changes, and from 1999 companies will be free to take a whole range of business decisions without having to worry about ACT and, more particularly, surplus ACT.

Research Expenses (Blind Trust)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the trustees of her blind trust for research expenses; and if she will publish its trust deed. [20892]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The structure of the blind trust which is used to pay the salary of a member of staff in my parliamentary office was discussed in advance with the relevant House of Commons authorities, who confirmed that it was in full

conformity with the rules. I have declared in the register of member's interests the information required about the trust and I have nothing further to add.

Low Pay Commission

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is government policy to accept the conclusions of the Low Pay Commission in full when it reports. [20902]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The Government will give due weight and consideration to any recommendations which the Low Pay Commission makes on those matters referred to it. If, on making the first regulations, the Government decide to act in a different manner from the recommendations of the Commission a report shall be laid before both Houses containing a statement of the reasons for the decision.

Gas-powered Electricity Plants

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance the Government have issued to companies wishing to build new gas-powered electricity plants. [20899]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Applicants are referred to Planning Circular 14/90 which provides advice to local planning authorities on the section 36 procedure.

Industrial Tribunal Decisions

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the number of industrial tribunal decisions which are fully complied with within a period of two months from the tribunal decision. [21174]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department does not generally collect data on the payment of awards. However, the most recent survey of Industrial Tribunal Applications (the 1992 Survey of Industrial Tribunal Applications, Employment Department Research Series No. 22) reported that the median time for payment of awards as a lump sum was 7 to 14 days after the hearing. Once an award is made, the payment is a matter for the parties and it can be enforced through the civil courts in the normal manner. To help ensure prompt payment, awards which are paid late attract interest.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what mechanisms are available to ensure the enforcement of industrial tribunal decisions. [21175]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Industrial tribunal awards of money are enforced through the normal mechanisms of the civil courts. In Scotland they are enforced in the same manner as extract decrees arbitral. This means that if payment is not made the creditor may proceed to diligence without requiring to refer to the civil courts for a decree. Diligence is effected in the normal manner for civil debts. To help ensure prompt payment, awards which are paid late will attract interest.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to introduce procedures to allow for easier enforcement of industrial tribunal decisions; and if she will make a statement. [21176]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have no plans to change the procedures for the enforcement of industrial tribunal decisions. Monetary awards are enforced in a similar way to other awards made by the civil courts.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

St. Margaret's School, Carlton

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will decide whether St. Margaret's School, Carlton, Bedfordshire should be closed. [20571]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce his decision shortly.

University Admissions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will take steps to encourage universities to publish data on the percentage of state school applications and admissions; [20516]

(2) how many, and which, universities currently publish data relating to the percentage of state school applications and admissions; [20517]

(3) how many, and which, universities currently publish data relating to the percentage of *(a)* applications and *(b)* admissions of candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds. [20518]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend welcomes the various Dearing Report recommendations on widening participation and has asked the Higher Education Funding Council for England to give priority in funding additional places to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation. We shall be monitoring the composition of applicants and new entrants to higher education as a whole. It is, however, for individual universities and colleges to determine whether or not to publish data on the characteristics of applicants and new entrants to their own institution. The Department does not keep a record of which universities do or do not publish such information, but we know that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge publish annually an analysis of applications and accepted applicants which includes details of the candidates' previous schooling. The Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS) routinely provide each higher education establishment with detailed analyses of their applicants and accepted applicants through the bi-annual Management Statistics and the institutional datasets. Ethnicity data are available by institution within the Higher Education Management Statistics, available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency. With the authorisation of the institutions involved, UCAS can provide demographic details of applicants and accepted applicants to each institution.

Key Stage 3

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of scripts have been remarked in each local education authority for

all key stage 3 tests undertaken in *(a)* English, *(b)* maths and *(c)* science; and in what percentage of scripts the (i) scores and (ii) final levels changed. [20671]

Mr. Byers: This information is collected on a national basis only in terms of the number of pupils in the review process and the number of those receiving changes to their test levels. The data are as follows:

	Percentage of pupils reviewed	*Percentage of levels changed*
English	7	2
Mathematics	0.02	0.001
Science	0.07	0.005

Young Workers (EU)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received on the incidence of young people from other EU countries taking up paid work for which there are British young people available. [20701]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have received no such representations. The EU Single Market enables movement of workers of all ages in both directions.

University Grants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current level of grant to *(a)* Brunel university, *(b)* City university, *(c)* Birmingham university and *(d)* Coventry university. [20889]

Dr. Howells: The information is set out in the following table.

Institution	*Funding Council Grant academic year 1997–98 £ million*
Brunel university	28
City university	18
Birmingham university	65
Coventry university	32

Disability Rights Task Force

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will appoint a representative of groups with learning disabilities to the Disability Rights Task Force. [21100]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 15 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 7.

Workplace Discrimination (HIV and AIDS)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to assist companies to prevent discrimination against persons with HIV or AIDS in the workplace. [20716]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We announced on 1 October a three part strategy to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. This involves the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission (DRC), a Disability Rights Task Force to undertake a wide review on how to implement such civil rights and the implementation of the remaining rights of access to goods, facilities and services under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

The Task Force met for the first time on 16 December. One of its first jobs in the New Year will be to consider the role and functions of the DRC. We intend to establish a Commission which serves the needs of disabled people and in so doing will work supportively with business.

The Task Force will also consider a wide range of issues concerning comprehensive civil rights and is likely to wish to consider the position of people with HIV or AIDS in the workplace.

At the moment, the DDA protects disabled people—including people with AIDS or HIV infection which affects normal day to day activities—against discrimination by employers with 20 or more employees. We are currently reviewing the position of small employers excluded from the DDA. A booklet "What employers need to know" is available to assist employers in relation to their duties under the DDA and there is also a Code of Practice containing practical guidance for employers. We are considering what other information might usefully be made available to employers.

The Department of Health set up the National Aids Trust (NAT) in 1987, as a fully independent charity. The employers' initiative run by the NAT provides a statement of employment principles for HIV and AIDS and is aimed at assisting employers in the effective management of HIV and AIDS in the workplace, including preventing discrimination against people with HIV and AIDS.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Social Affairs Council on 15 December. [21669]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), and I represented the UK at the Social Affairs Council on 15 December.

The Council passed a Resolution adopting the 1998 Employment Guidelines, and committing Member States to produce National Employment Action Plans in time for examination at the Cardiff European Council in June 1998.

The Council adopted two Directives which apply to the United Kingdom the European Works Council and Parental Leave Directives. It also adopted the Part-time Work Directive, under the procedures set out in the Agreement on Social Policy. A Commission proposal to extend this measure to the UK is expected shortly. There was broad agreement on the extension of working-time controls to sectors excluded from the Working-time Directive. The Council had further discussion on the follow-up to the Davignon report on worker participation under the proposed European Company Statute; and my hon. Friend the Minister of State confirmed that the UK Presidency would aim to make further progress on this dossier under its Presidency.

The proposal for a programme of analysis and research of Member States' employment policies was agreed, with a budget of 30 mecu over three years.

There was discussion on the obligations of Member States to bring civil servants in special schemes within the co-ordination mechanism of regulation 1408/71. I confirmed that the UK intended to make progress with this dossier.

The Council adopted the Directive on the Burden of Proof in Sex Discrimination Cases on the basis of the common position agreed in June of this year. A Commission proposal to extend the directive to the UK will be produced shortly.

The Council had a wide-ranging discussion about the follow-up to the Peking conference on women, and explored what Member States were doing by way of mainstreaming, positive actions, and combating violence against women.

The Commission made presentations on the recent ruling by the European Court of Justice in the Marschall case, and on its Action Plan for the Free Movement of Workers.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the total level of aid planned to be paid to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998–99 *(a)* directly and *(b)* via other agencies; and if she will make a statement. [20745]

Mr. Foulkes: Our provisional plans are to spend £5 million from bilateral aid funds in Bosnia in 1998–99.

My Department's contributions to multilateral aid agencies for the coming year are not yet confirmed. Allocations are reported after expenditure.

The expenditure for 1997–98 is expected to be £18.75 million which includes £17 million of emergency aid.

Treasury Committee Report

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the IMF in respect of the recommendations of the Treasury Committee in its Fourth Report of Session 1996–97 (HC68) that it should establish an independent evaluation unit reporting directly to the Board and publishing its findings. [18352]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply to this question on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who is the Governor of the IMF.

We strongly support an enhanced evaluation function in the IMF and have consistently pressed for an independent evaluation unit. We will continue to do so, but further progress on this is unlikely before the end of next year when the two year trial period for the current limited external evaluations will be completed. We are therefore working to ensure that the existing external evaluation system works as effectively as possible, and take an active role in the Executive Directors committee which co-ordinates the process.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism (East Midlands)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to promote tourism in the East Midlands. [20929]

Mr. Tom Clarke: On 26 November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that the Government will work with the Tourism Forum to develop a new strategy to maximise the economic and job creation potential of the industry. The strategy will benefit all regions including the East Midlands.

In addition, the Government assists the industry directly by providing grant-in-aid to support the marketing and development activities of the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourist Board.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium complaint; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20534]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is following the guidance set out in the CCTA's Tackling the Year 2000 guides and is in the process of alerting all non-governmental organisations and suppliers with which it does business of the importance of Year 2000 compliance and of the need for all organisations and suppliers of strategic goods and services to be compliant by 31 December 1999.

Royal Parks

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the annual number of visitors to each of London's royal parks. [20932]

Mr. Tom Clarke: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 17 December 1997:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the annual number of visitors to London's Royal Parks.

The most recent figures relate to 1995. They are based on counts carried out during annual visitor surveys in the parks and are therefore approximate.

Park	Visitors (millions)
Regent's Park (including Primrose Hill)	5
St. James's Park	5.5
Green Park	3.4
Hyde Park	4.7
Kensington Gardens	2.5
Greenwich Park	3.4
Bushy Park	1.6
Richmond Park	2.6

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Jonathan Aitken

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Attorney-General on what date the DPP received a letter from the editor of *The Guardian* about the alleged perjury of Jonathan Aitken following the collapse of the libel action; on what date she replied; and if he will make a statement. [20383]

The Attorney-General: On 20 June 1997, the Director of Public Prosecutions received a letter from the editor of the Guardian. She replied on 23 June 1997, explaining that the Crown Prosecution Service is not an investigative authority. A complaint against Mr. Aitken was later made to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, who has appointed a team of officers to investigate the allegations made against Mr. Aitken. That investigation continues. The police, at the conclusion of their inquiries, will forward a report to the Crown Projection Service. This will then be reviewed in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how long on average a person applying for entry clearance for settlement, who was interviewed in November 1997, waited for an interview, at each British post in the Indian subcontinent; and how long those applying for settlement in November 1997 may expect to wait before interview, at each British post in the Indian subcontinent; [20689]

(2) what was the staff complement of the people dealing *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time with migration and visa matters at each British post in the Indian subcontinent in (i) December 1995, (ii) June 1996, (iii) December 1996, (iv) June 1997 and (v) December 1997; and how many of these positions were vacant at each date; [20686]

(3) what has been the average period for which a position in the migration and visa staff at each British post in the Indian subcontinent, has remained vacant after a postholder has left over the last three years. [20687]

Mr. Fatchett: In view of the amount of detail needed to answer these questions, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons, will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Middle East

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his proposals for the Middle East peach process during the UK presidency of the EU. [21239]

Mr. Fatchett: Seeking to re-inject momentum into the Middle East peace process will be a high priority during our Presidency. We are anxious to see existing agreements implemented in full and progress made on other outstanding issues. We will be pursuing EU proposals which complement and support US efforts. These include a code of conduct to guide future negotiations; a mechanism to institutionalise security co-operation and handle crises; facilitating agreement on implementation of commitments under the Interim Agreement, in particular on Gaza air and sea ports and transit arrangements between the West Bank and Gaza; and engaging Israel in a dialogue on ways of removing obstacles to Palestinian economic development.

Dependent Territories (Caribbean)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contingency plans he has in place for dependent territories in the Caribbean in the eventuality of other volcanic eruptions. [21041]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* All the Caribbean Dependent Territories have an office of disaster preparedness and disaster contingency plans which are regularly reviewed. These plans take account of the hazards posed by flooding and their principal causes: hurricanes or tsunamis set up by submarine volcanic activity, such a san eruption by the volcano Kick 'Em Jenny, located off Grenada.

Dependent Territories (Internet Services)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Commissioner for Pitcairn has had with businesses seeking to create employment on Pitcairn concerning the provision of Internet services to the island; and for what reasons the Commissioner has been seeking to acquire the domain name for Pitcairn from the designated manager. [21045]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Commissioner is currently investigating ways of improving communications with the Pitcairn Islands to permit Internet access. The Commissioner is seeking to acquire the domain name for Pitcairn in response to a request to this effect form the Pitcairn Island Council.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on Internet services for Pitcairn Island and other dependent territories; and if he will make a statement. [21038]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Existing data communications with the Pitcairn Islands do not permit access to the Intenet. There are therefore no Internet services operating from or within Pitcairn. The Commissioner is currently investigating ways of improving communications so that the Internet can be

accessed from Pitcairn. Our policy on issues of this sort is to seek to fulfil the wishes of the individual dependent territory governments.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the Government's policy to seek to regulate or control domain names on the Internet in respect of United Kingdom dependent territories; and if he will make a statement. [21039]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Our policy is to seek to fulfil the wishes expressed by the individual dependent territory governments. This Department does not generally authorise third parties to administer top level Internet domain names on behalf of dependent territories unless there is some obvious direct benefit to the dependent territories.

Human Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *103*, what steps his Department has taken to inform other bodies of its support for the broad intentions relating to each United Nations text; and to what extent he has monitored the implementation of the principles contained in the texts. [20329]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Our support for the five United Nations texts, and for the principles which they contain, is recorded in the reports of the UN meetings where the texts were adopted. For the convenience of the House, I have arranged for copies of these reports to be placed in the Libraries of the House today. The texts are recommendatory in nature, and are not legally binding on member States. It is for the relevant home Departments to consider the recommendations contained in the texts, and to monitor their implementation as appropriate.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if constitutional change, other than as provided in the Treaty of Utrecht, in the status of Gibraltar is a matter solely for the decision of Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Gibraltar. [21044]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Constitutional change is a matter for the decision of Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Gibraltar provided that it is compatible with the Treaty of Utrecht. We also stand by the commitment in the preamble to the 1969 constitution that there can be no change in sovereignty over Gibraltar without the freely and democratically expressed consent of its people.

NORTHERN IRELAND

RUC Weapons (Losses)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* number and *(b)* type of RUC issue weapons and of what description have been lost, stolen or otherwise unaccounted for in each of the past 10 years; how many of these weapons are believed to have fallen into the hands of *(a)* Republican and *(b)* Loyalist paramilitaries; and how many have been recovered subsequently. [19497]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The information requested for the period 1 January 1988 to 4 December 1997 is set out in the tables. All of the weapons referred to are handguns with the exception of one rifle stolen in 1988 but which was subsequently recovered.

Year	*Stolen*	*Recovered*	*Not recovered*
1988	9	8	1
1989	13	11	2
1990	13	12	1
1991	14	13	1
1992	3	3	0
1993	5	3	2
1994	14	9	5
1995	6	2	4
1996	6	2	4
1997	2	1	1
Total	85	64	21

Year	*Stolen*	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Other*[1]
1988	9	3	3	3
1989	13	1	4	8
1990	13	3	1	9
1991	14	3	2	9
1992	3	1	0	2
1993	5	2	0	3
1994	14	2	0	12
1995	6	0	0	6
1996	6	0	0	6
1997	2	0	0	2
Total	85	15	10	60

[1] Other—Non-Terrorist/Criminal/Not Known.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 21 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *321*, on how many occasions and at what cost RUC officers travelled to Germany in November and December 1996 for training purposes and how many of them were (i) training German officers, (ii) being trained by German officers and (iii) participating in events involving more than the two forces. [19498]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* During November and December 1996 RUC officers travelled to Germany on 9 occasions for training purposes with the Army. Military transport was used at no cost to the RUC.

No training took place with German officers.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of 21 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *321*, what was the total cost in November and December 1996 of foreign travel for RUC officers on operational duties. [19499]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The total cost of foreign travel for RUC officers on operational duties in November and December 1996 was £35,604.20.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if her Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date her Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20521]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* My Departments are very aware of the importance of being Millennium compliant. They have taken steps to ensure compliance for the year 2000 by including an appropriate clause in contract documentation for the supply of goods and services. It is difficult to assess at this point in time how many suppliers are not Millennium compliant. However every effort is being made by my officials to encourage companies to become compliant through awareness seminars and liaising with organisations such as industry lead bodies and the CBI.

I have not specified a date when my Departments will cease to deal with non-governmental organisations and suppliers which are not Millennium compliant as the legalities of doing so are as yet unclear.

Euro

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the impact on Northern Ireland of the adoption of the euro by the Republic of Ireland. [20772]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Northern Ireland's interests, as part of the United Kingdom, are best served by this Government's policy that the United Kingdom will enter EMU only if the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous and if the people agree in a referendum. Great Britain continues to be Northern Ireland's main export market. The impact on Northern Ireland of the Republic of Ireland entering EMU earlier than the United Kingdom would depend, among other things, on the stability of the sterling/euro exchange rate and the flexibility of local labour markets.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Northern Ireland Museums Council was consulted on the preparation of the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997. [21133]

Mr. Worthington: Yes.

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what costs have been incurred in advertising for personnel for the Museums Institution for Northern Ireland prior to its being given parliamentary approval. [21131]

Mr. Worthington: No costs have been incurred in respect of personnel solely relating to the new institution. A director has been sought to fill the current vacancies at the Ulster Museum and Ulster Folk and Transport Museum with the intention that this person would in due course become the director of the new institution. Advertisements relating to this appointment have been run on two occasions and cost £26,410 in total.

Advertisements to seek trustees for the Northern Ireland Museums Council and the new body have cost £3,760.

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the individuals and organisations that commented on the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997. [21136]

Mr. Worthington: The organisations and individuals who commented were as follows:

Museums

Ulster Museum (Board of Trustees)

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (Board of Trustees) plus two individual members of staff

Ulster-American Folk Park (Board of Trustees)

Museums related

Northern Ireland Museums' Council

Museums' Association

Irish Museums' Association

Museums and Galleries Commission

Irish Professional Conservators' and Restorers' Association

Down County Museum

District Councils

Ards Borough Council

Armagh City and District Council.

Ballymoney City Council

Belfast City Council

Craigavon Borough Council

Derry City Council

Down District Council

Magherafelt District Council

Newtownabbey Borough Council

Strabane District Council

Government

Virginia Bottomley MP

Department of Economic Development

Department of the Environment

Northern Ireland Audit Office

Michael D. Higgins TD

Other bodies

SDLP

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Sports Council for Northern Ireland

Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland

Ministry of Defence

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

Ulster Historical Foundation

NIPSA (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance)

William Thompson MP

Individuals

D. R. M. Weatherup

Sir Phillip Foreman

Clive Priestly

Mr. Mackay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the advice of the Museums and Galleries Commission was sought *(a)* before preparation of the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997,

(b) during the consultation stage on the draft Order and *(c)* following the representations received on the draft Order. [21130]

Mr. Worthington: The advice of the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) was sought before the preparation of the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997 and during the consultation stage. After this, further consideration was restricted to the Museums Merger Steering Group which includes representatives of the three museums involved in the merger together with independent representatives one of whom is the NI Commissioner for MGC.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what fluoride compounds are added to public water supplies in Tandragee and Bangor; in what concentration; and by whom they are supplied. [20063]

Mr. Worthington: The fluoride content of the water supply is increased only in water supplied to Tandragee and Holywood. The water supplied to Bangor is not subject to fluoridation. The compound of fluorine used to increase the fluoride content of the water supply is hexafluorosilicic acid.

The fluoridation of water is subject to the provisions of the Water (Fluoridation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. Under the provisions of that Order the concentration of fluoride is, so far as is reasonably practicable, required to be maintained at one milligram per litre.

Hexafluorosilicic acid is purchased from a supplier selected by annual tender.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the risks to health arising from fluoridation of water supplies. [20065]

Mr. Worthington: The overwhelming scientific evidence has concluded that fluoridation of water supplies at one part per million parts of water is entirely safe. The water service monitors the supply to ensure that the concentration is maintained at this level.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to *(a)* extend and *(b)* cease the fluoridation of water supplies in Northern Ireland. [20067]

Mr. Worthington: There are presently no plans to extend or cease the fluoridation of water supplies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* households and *(b)* residents receive fluoridated public water supplies in (i) Tandragee and (ii) Bangor. [20069]

Mr. Worthington: The estimated number of households and residents in Tandragee and Holywood normally receiving water supplies with an increased fluoride levels is as follows:

	Number
Tandragee	
Households receiving water supplies with an increased fluoride content	1,000
Residents receiving water supplies with increased fluoride content	3,000
Holywood	
Household receiving water supplies with an increased fluoride content	1,400
Residents receiving water supplies with increased fluoride content	3,100

The water supplied to Bangor is not subject to fluoridation.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representation she has received in relation to fluoridation at Tandaragee and Bangor. [20064]

Mr. Worthington: I have received 15 representations in relation to fluoridation. Five of the representations related to the fluoridation of Tandragee's water supply.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the impact of fluoridation on the *(a)* dental and *(b)* general medical health of the population of Tandragee and Bangor.[20066]

Mr. Worthington: No assessment of the effects of fluoridation have been carried out in Tandaragee or Holywood because the population supplied with fluoridated water is too small for a valid statistical assessment to be made. However observation by general dental practitioners and community dentists indicate the patients in Tandragee and Holywood supplied with fluoridated water enjoy better dental health than those who do not receive fluoridated water.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis Tandragee and Bangor were selected as the location for the fluoridation of public water supplies. [20068]

Mr. Worthington: Following encouragement from Government in 1968 Councils responsible for Tandragee and Holywood agreed to introduce fluoridation schemes in these areas.

The water supplied to Bangor is not subject to fluoridation.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Water Service commenced adding flouride compounds to public water supplies at Tandragee and Bangor; and what public consultation preceded such action. [20070]

Mr. Worthington: Fluoridation takes place at the water treatment works serving Tandragee and Holywood. These schemes were both introduced by their respective Councils. The Holywood plant became operational in 1970 followed in 1974 with the opening of the Tandragee plant.

The water supplied to Bangor is not subject to fluoridation.

Housing Executive

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the religious and community background of (i) male and (ii) female clerical officers and clerk/typists in each office of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. [19575]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, who has advised me that information about the religious and community background of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's workforce is not published at a level below that of the organisation as a whole. This is published annually in the Fair Employment Commission's Report "A Profile of the Northern Ireland Workforce Summary of the Monitoring Returns". The most recent report for 1996 is available in the Library.

TREASURY

VAT (NHS Trusts)

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total performance-related pay received by staff in HM Customs and Excise offices responsible for recovering VAT from NHS trusts in each year since 1990. [20000]

Dawn Primarolo: All pay awards made to all Customs and Excise staff are performance related. No central record is kept of the staff who carry out VAT assurance work on NHS trusts.

National Asset Register

Mr. Colman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *359–60*, to the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), if Departments and agencies will be able to use receipts generated from asset sales to support investment under PFI schemes. [21656]

Mr. Darling: Yes.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19970]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is as follows:

Public body	*Names*	*Position*	*Whether remunerated*
Private Finance Task Force	Mr. Adrian Montague	Chief Executive	Remunerated
Financial Services Authority	Ms Dierdre Hutton	Directors	All remunerated
	Mr. Christopher Rodrigues		
	Mr. Robert Smith		
	Mr. Stephen Thieke		
	Mr. Brian Williamson CBE[1]		
Financial Services Tribunal	Ms M. E. Black	Members of Tribunal	All unremunerated (but fee paid per sitting)
	Mr. R. G. Burnett		
	Ms J. Castiau		
	Mr. K. W. Emery		
	Mr. W. R. Gemmell		
	Mr. R. C. H. Jeens		
	Miss M. S. Lai		
	Mr. R. Leighton		
	Mr. I N. Mokhtar		
	Mr. N. M. Moore		
	Mr. J. Parsloe		
	Mr. P. Purewal		
	Mr. J. C. Ritchie		
	Mr. I. L. Rushton		
	Mrs. L. M. Salisbury		
	Mr. M. E. Tuke		
	Mr. W. D. Walker OBE		
	Ms V. Ward		
	Mr. P. D. Williams		
	Mr. B. R. Wordsworth		
Board of Banking Supervision	Sir Alan Hardcastle[1,2]	Independent Member	Remunerated
VAT and Duties Tribunal	Mr. John Davidson	Part time lay Members	All unremunerated (but fee paid per sitting)
	Mr. Alex McLoughlin		
	Mrs. Joanna Neill		
National Savings	Mr. Roy Heape	Non-executive directors	Remunerated
	Ms Judy Lowe		
	Mr. James Turner		

[1] Re-appointment.

[2] Joint appointment by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what date the Inland Revenue systems will be capable of handling the Euro; and when the Treasury will instruct the Inland Revenue to prepare for sterling joining economic and monetary union. [20317]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue already accept payments in foreign currency and this facility will be extended to the euro. The Inland Revenue, along with other departments, has already started to consider what should be done to prepare for the option of the UK joining the single currency in the next Parliament.

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Inland Revenue has made of the impact on its activities of sterling joining economic and monetary union. [20319]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue is reviewing the implications which would arise if the UK were to adopt the single currency.

Declarations of Origin (Israel)

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if Customs and Excise's inquiries into the true origin of products imported from Israel includes *(a)* dairy products, *(b)* other agricultural products and *(c)* manufactured products; and what other products are included; [20348]

(2) when EC officials will meet Israeli representatives to seek a solution to the problem of false origin declarations. [20350]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs and Excise are currently awaiting replies from Israel in relation to inquiries concerning textile waste and telecommunications equipment. Israel has undertaken to verify the originating status of orange juice exported to the Community since June 1995 and to complete these inquiries by 10 March 1998. Further inquiries relating to a range of manufactured goods have been suspended following undertakings given by Israel at a meeting with EC officials on 28 November to resolve the doubts concerning the validity of preferential certificates.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Customs and Excise experts from the Member States of the European Communities will meet to co-ordinate further measures on verifying Israeli; origin declarations. [20349]

Dawn Primarolo: Meetings took place on 28 November and 10 December 1997. A further meeting to agree a common policy is scheduled for 12 January 1998.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Customs and Excise will report the results of their inquiries into the true origin of products imported from Israel. [20347]

Dawn Primarolo: It is normal procedure for Customs to inform importers when inquiries are sent to Israel. As soon as a response is received the importer is advised.

Green Minister

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the current priorities of the Green Minister within his Department. [20512]

Dawn Primarolo: As the Treasury's Green Minister I am committed to 'greening' the Department's operations, to integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas, and to improving the economic analysis underpinning the Government's environmental initiatives.

The statement of intent on Environmental Taxation, issued with the July Budget, committed the Government to the delivery of sustainable growth. In line with that statement, we are exploring the scope for using the tax system, where appropriate, to deliver environmental objectives. Key current priorities were indicated in the Pre-Budget Report.

Student Suicides

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many students have committed suicide in the current academic year. [20890]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 17 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent questions on suicides by students.

In the period 1 September 1996 to 31 July 1997, there were a total of 114 suicides recorded to persons aged 16 and over in England and Wales who were described as 'students' at the time their deaths were registered. These are the latest figures available which approximate to a completed academic year and include deaths where the underlying cause of death was coded as suicide or undetermined injury.

EU Banks and Credit Institutions (Supervision)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what competence the Governing Council or Executive Board of the European central bank will have for requiring its component national central banks to apply common criteria or rules for licensing and supervision of their respective national banks and credit institutions; [21225]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *168*, if he will make a statement on the treaty responsibilities of the European Central Bank in respect of the licensing and supervision of national banks and credit institutions in the event of UK entry into EMU and its consequent duties in respect of actions of national banks. [21004]

Mrs. Liddell: None. Article 105(6) of the Treaty would allow the ECB to carry out specific tasks concerning policies relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions but only after legislation by the Council, acting unanimously, had conferred these functions on the ECB. No such legislation has been proposed by the Commission. Under Article 105(5) the European System of Central Banks, including ECB itself, will have an obligation to contribute to the smooth conduct of policies pursued by Member States' competent authorities, relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions.

Export Transactions

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of British export business was conducted in *(a)* US dollars, *(b)* German marks, *(c)* French francs, *(d)* other EU currencies and *(e)* other world currencies in each of the last five years. [21200]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 4 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *101–02,* on 13 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *625–26,* and on 24 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *358–59.*

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Packaging Waste

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on his review of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997; and when the review will commence; and what procedures it will follow; [19739]

(2) if he will make it his policy to issue reprocessing certificates under the packaging waste regulations only to those companies which achieve the tonnage of waste in each material for which they have an obligation; and if he will make a statement; [20106]

(3) what representations he has received from the packaging industry concerning the compatibility of the practice of shared responsibility with free market principles; and if he will make a statement; [20105]

(4) what representations he has received from those businesses which are involved with the packaging waste regulations which have insufficient packaging waste arising from their businesses to meet their targets; and if he will make a statement. [20104]

Mr. Meacher: Increasing the recycling and recovery of waste packaging is an important element of achieving a more sustainable waste strategy. The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 are intended broadly to double UK recycling and recovery rates by the year 2001, so that around 50 per cent. of all waste packaging is recovered. These regulations, enacted by the previous Government, are based on an industry agreement reached on 15 December 1995 and, as I have indicated previously, I am keen to ensure that we review their effectiveness and ensure that they fairly reflect that agreement. I accept the importance of an early Review as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Packaging, chaired by Sir Peter Parker, to the then Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), in his letter of 9 July 1996, a copy of which is in the Library.

I have set four broad objectives for the Review:

(i) To determine whether the measures in the Regulations are sufficient to ensure that the UK is on course to meet the targets set by the EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste;

(ii) To identify the scope for *increased* recycling and recovery of packaging waste so as to make a greater contribution to the UK's sustainable waste management strategy;

(iii) To simplify the Regulations wherever possible, while fulfilling the requirements of the EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste (94/62EC) and maintaining the "shared approach" legal obligation as the basis of the regulations;

(iv) To achieve fairness in terms of the 15 December 1995 agreement on the sharing of the legal obligation between sectors and to encourage co-operation along the packaging chain.

I am asking the Advisory Committee to let me have their recommendations on the best means of achieving these objectives and in addition to look at the following specific issues:

(i) The case for separate targets for household and commercial and industrial recycling, and the scope for strengthening the local authority role;

(ii) The case for additional regulatory measures to encourage minimisation, and reuse of packaging and greater consumer awareness of opportunities to minimise and recycle;

(iii) The effectiveness of current requirements on evidence of compliance and in particular the system of proformas issued by accredited reprocessors (known as Producer Responsibility Notes) and whether this system should be retained in its present form or could be improved;

(iv) How small businesses can best be encouraged to play a part in increasing recycling and recovery levels.

I have asked the Advisory Committee to let me have their recommendations by the end of May and I will consider representations from all other interested parties before determining what proposals to bring forward for public consultation later in 1998.

I have today also received the Advisory Committee's recommendations on the issues on which I asked for their views earlier this year. A copy of their advice is in the Library. With regard to readjustment of the shareout figures in the regulations, I agree with the Committee that the data provided so far this year are not sufficiently robust on which to base a new shareout allocation, and I have asked for further work to be carried out to validate these data, as far as is practicable. I will give further consideration to this and the other issues looked at by the Committee in bringing forward proposals for public consultation next year.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (West Midlands)

Jacqui Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will investigate what arrangements the West Midlands Leasehold Valuation Tribunal will make to administer the valuation cases to be submitted on behalf of the Redditch Leasehold Action Committee; and what targets he has set for the maximum time that the leaseholders concerned should expect to wait after submission for decisions. [20462]

Mr. Raynsford: Leasehold Valuation Tribunals are statutorily independent bodies. I understand that the West Midland Leasehold Valuation Tribunal proposes to deal with these cases in batches of about 10 to 25, as submitted by the Agent for the Leaseholders. Applications on this scale have never had to be dealt with before, and the Tribunal has been in touch with the Agents for all the parties concerned throughout. Despite having no

powers to issue directions, it is proactively seeking to encourage the parties to identify and narrow the relevant issues prior to the hearings.

The first batch is to be dealt with on 5 February 1998 and the intention is to hear subsequent batches at the rate of one per week.

The West Midland Tribunal, of course, also has to deal concurrently with cases from other parts of their area.

On this basis, the earliest cases will have taken approximately 12 months from receipt of the applications at the Tribunal offices to issue of the decisions, but these cases have been held back at the request of the parties awaiting the decisions on three earlier applications submitted by freeholders.

It is anticipated that, as hearings progress, later cases should be decided in about half that time.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State fore the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public support has been provided to enable a train service from Edinburgh to run direct through the Channel Tunnel or to connect with the channel tunnel service at Waterloo. [20697]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The provision of rail services through the Channel Tunnel is the commercial responsibility of Eurostar (UK) Ltd. (EUKL), which was transferred to the private sector in May 1996. When EUKL (then called European Passenger Services Ltd.) was in Government ownership—9 May 1994 to 31 May 1996—direct grants totalling £423.7 million were made towards running costs and investment. No specific sums were, however, earmarked for the provision of services to or from Edinburgh.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to assist the development of a high-speed rail link from Edinburgh to the continent via the Channel Tunnel. [20698]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A new high speed rail link between the Channel Tunnel and London St. Pancras is planned to be completed in 2003. This new line, along with the East Coast Main Line, should provide for high speed trains between Edinburgh and the Continent.

Heathrow Rail Link

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he expects work on the Heathrow rail link to *(a)* start and *(b)* be completed. [20938]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Heathrow rail link. [20937]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Heathrow Express project is progressing well with services due to start in mid 1998.

Railtrack and BAA have taken forward a feasibility study looking at the potential for development of Heathrow–St. Pancras services. Investigations are at an early stage and it is not possible to say whether the scheme will be taken forward.

Kyoto Conference

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each of the delegations with whom he held meetings at the climate change conference in Kyoto; and if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* all papers submitted by the United Kingdom to the conference and *(b)* all papers made available to the United Kingdom delegation by other parties to the conference in the period up to and including 10 December. [20770]

Mr. Meacher: During the recent climate change conference in Kyoto, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I held meetings with representatives from the following delegations:

The European Commission and the member states of the European Union

The Group of 77 (represented by Tanzania, India, China, Malaysia, Uganda, The Philippines, Colombia and Iran)

The United States of America

Japan

Australia

New Zealand

India

The United Nations Climate Change Secretariat

In addition, the UK delegation had meetings at official level with a wide range of other countries including Canada, Turkey, Zimbabwe, Russia, Pakistan and St. Kitts-Nevis.

I will shortly place in the Library copies of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement to the Conference and copies of those statements made by other parties which were made available to the United Kingdom delegation.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is proposing to take to bring to a conclusion the inquiry into terminal 5 at Heathrow. [20941]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. The conduct and timing of the inquiry is a matter for the Inspector who has been appointed to advise the Secretary of State on the proposed Terminal 5 and associated applications. The inquiry is currently expected to close in the second half of 1998.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the cost to public funds of the Heathrow Terminal 5 inquiry to date. [20942]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The estimated cost to date of the Terminal 5 inquiry to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, including its agencies, is about £8 million. It is estimated that the local authorities involved in the inquiry have spent around £6.5 million so far.

Opencast Coal Mining

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what conclusions he has reached from the recent consultation on the future of planning policy for opencast coal mining. [21011]

Mr. Caborn: We have not yet reached any conclusion because we are still considering the large number of responses in the consultation exercise.

Housing Repair

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of local government housing repairs take longer than four weeks to complete; and what steps the Government are taking to encourage local authorities to reduce that period. [20976]

Mr Raynsford: The information requested is not collected centrally.

The Government remain committed to the Right to Repair scheme, introduced for council tenants on 1 April 1994 as part of the Citizen's Charter initiative. This ensures that certain small, urgent repairs which might affect tenants' health, safety or security are done quickly, within 1 to 7 working days, according to the nature of the problem. The repairs covered by the scheme, and the prescribed periods in which the work must be carried out, are set out in the Schedule to the Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994. If such repairs are not carried out by the council within the statutory period, tenants may be eligible for compensation under the scheme.

The Government are keen to encourage all local authorities to perform to the standards of the best in managing their properties, and are discussing with the Local Government Association and others how the new Best Value regime can be developed to achieve this.

Road Safety

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria the Highways Agency uses to evaluate the siting of safety fencing on trunk roads. [20555]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The criteria used by the Highways Agency to Evaluate the siting of safety fences on trunk roads is set down in departmental standard TD 19/85 "Safety Fences and Barriers" which is contained in Volume 2, Section 2 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. A copy of TD 19/85 is lodged in the House of Commons Library. This was amended by the statement made by the then Minister for Roads and Traffic to Parliament on17 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *535*, which extended the provision of safety fencing to all dual carriageway trunk roads where it could be shown that this was justified by the traffic using the road. The Highways Agency together with the Transport Research Laboratory are examining accident data to evaluate the case for extending the provision of protection to roadside equipment and obstructions. If the results of this work indicate that a wider provision is necessary, revisions will be made to the Highways Agency standards in due course.

Capital Receipts (Bolton)

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the total capital receipts to be released to the borough of Bolton and over what period; and what proportion will be spent on housing. [20990]

Mr. Raynsford: Under our Capital Receipts Initiative, the borough of Bolton will receive a total of £1.033 million in 1997–98 and £3.305 million in 1998–99. Decisions about levels of funding under the Initiative over the longer term, will be taken in our Comprehensive Spending Review. Information supplied by the borough suggests that in 1998–99 they intend to spend 85 per cent. of these additional resources on housing schemes with the remaining 15 per cent. being used to support housing related regeneration projects.

Airport Signs

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *547*, concerning signs at airports, if she will require those words which do require to be used to appear additionally in other languages. [21141]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* No. Airports already provide supporting information in foreign languages where there is a specific need in a particular part of the airport. But to require the inclusion of foreign languages on signs would risk making them more difficult for passengers to absorb quickly, and would risk offending those whose languages were not used. If the hon. Member has a specific need at a particular airport in mind, he may like to discuss it with the airport management concerned.

I am also taking this opportunity to clarify the answer which I gave to the hon. Member on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *547*. The UK follows the Recommended Practice on international signs contained in the Chicago Convention, Annex 9, provision 6.9, which is that the international signs published jointly by the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation should be used at airports and ports. Among the general principles set out in the joint publication (Document 9636) are that as far as possible symbols should be used without words on signs at airports and ports.

Local Transport Infrastructure

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will announce the allocation of capital resources for expenditure on local transport infrastructure in 1998–99. [21611]

Dr. Strang: This year a total of £623 million is to be allocated to local highway authorities and passenger transport authorities in England for capital expenditure on their transport infrastructure in 1998–99. This consists of £155 million in transport supplementary grant (TSG), £40 million for Croydon Tramlink and around £427 million in annual capital guideline (ACG), supplementary credit approval (SCA), grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 and grant under section 13 of the Industrial Development Act 1982.

In this year's settlement I am allocating resources to 10 new packages, of transport measures in addition to the 61 packages which are already being funded. A further six authorities will receive allocations to pursue specific measures in packages that are not yet ready for full acceptance. The total allocated to packages is increased by £6 million to £85 million. The West Midlands

metropolitan package will enjoy a rise of £1.175 million to allow accelerated progress on its bus-based strategy. The Avon package sees an increase of £1 million to deliver integrated transport measures in the Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare areas.

In addition to increased funding for multi-modal packages in 1998–99 we are raising the allocations for cross boundary projects in London which we judge to be the way to promote alternatives to the car in the capital. Support for the London Bus Priority Network rises by £2 million to £11 million, and the London Cycle Network gains a further £1 million to reach £5 million, £40 million goes to Croydon's Tramlink project now in progress.

In Manchester £7.2 million is allocated to help with rebuilding the city centre following the IRA bombing.

In a year of tight budgetary pressures these initiatives confirm the Government's resolve to pursue integrated transport policies which will reduce traffic by promoting sustainable alternatives to the private car.

Safety is of primary importance. The £50 million allocated for improvements in locations with a poor accident record will keep up the momentum in the drive to meet current casualty reduction targets. The extra resources for transport packages will enhance safety even further by reducing traffic, calming that which remains, and furnishing better facilities for cycling, walking and public transport.

A sum of £180 million is being allocated for the structural maintenance of principal roads, and the assessment, strengthening and structural maintenance of bridges.

The allocation for major schemes already being supported is £280 million in 1998–99.

Table 1 sets out the national totals for different types of expenditure. Table 2 shows the total amounts of grant, credit approvals and gross approved expenditure for each of the 149 local highway authorities, and the 6 passenger transport authorities. The Government Offices for the Regions are notifying them today of their allocations. Table 3 lists the allocations to transport packages. Copies of the tables have been placed in the Library.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he will make available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1996, 1997 or 1998 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [21612]

Ms Armstrong: On 10 October I invited all authorities which are eligible to participate in the Local Government Reorganisation Costs Scheme for 1998–99, and which have been or are to be reorganised on or before 1 April 1998, to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1998–99. On the basis, inter alia, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the maximum amounts that it would be appropriate to allocate towards such costs.

The amounts are as follows:

Maximum amounts: £000s rounded

Authority	*1998–99*
1996 reorganisations	
Hartlepool Borough Council	720
Middlesbrough Borough Council	2,284
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	1,646
Bristol City Council	1,268
Bath and North East Somerset Council	1,280
North Somerset Council	652
South Gloucestershire Council	1,000
Kingston upon Hull Council	1,823
East Riding Yorkshire Council	4,259
North Lincolnshire Council	3,289
North East Lincolnshire Council	1,853
Total	20,074
1997 reorganisations	
Luton Borough Council	1,973
Milton Keynes Borough Council	2,250
Derby City Council	1,602
Bournemouth Borough Council	500
Poole Borough Council	1,100
Darlington Borough Council	993
Brighton and Hove Council	1,207
Portsmouth City Council	1,695
Southampton City Council	2,185
Rutland Council	1,065
Stoke on Trent City Council	1,348
Swindon Borough Council	902
Total	16,820
1998 reorganisations	
Reading Borough Council	2,081
Slough Borough Council	1,781
Wokingham District Council	2,262
County of Herefordshire District Council	5,155
Worcestershire County Council	1,150
Malvern Hills District Council	360
Devon County Council	715
Plymouth City Council	10,109
Torbay Borough Council	6,396
Essex County Council	2,683
Southend on Sea Borough Council	1,690
Thurrock Borough Council	3,067
Nottinghamshire County Council	3,334
Nottingham City Council	3,920
Cheshire County Council	2,275
Halton Borough Council	2,832
Warrington Borough Council	3,013
Shropshire County Council	994
The Wrekin District Council	4,301
Kent County Council	752
Medway Towns Council	5,674
Cambridgeshire County Council	320
Peterborough City Council	2,204
Lancashire County Council	1,465
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	3,349
Blackpool Borough Council	3,188
Total	75,070
Combined total allocations	111,964

Redcar and Cleveland, York City and Leicester City Councils did not submit bids. Newbury District Council, The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Forest Borough Council have not bid for SCA.

Thameslink 2000

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the application

by Railtrack for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 in respect of the Thameslink 2000 project is to be referred to Parliament as a scheme involving proposals of national significance. [21618]

Dr. Strang: Whilst my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agrees that the proposals in the draft Railtrack (Thameslink 2000) Order are important for London, he does not consider them to be of sufficient significance in national terms to fall within section 9 of the 1992 Act. The application will not therefore be referred to Parliament under the provisions of that section of the Act.

Planning Blight

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the report of the interdepartmental working group on blight; and if he will make a statement. [21664]

Mr. Caborn: I have today placed copies of the final report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Blight in the Library. The report is accompanied by a draft Code of Practice on the dissemination of information during the various stages of major infrastructure developments. I have also deposited copies of the report of the research conducted by the City University Business School into the operation of compulsory purchase orders which is published today by the Stationery Office.

The Interdepartmental Working Group on Blight was set up to review the scope, cause and effects of blight arising during the various stages of major infrastructure projects and to consider whether any practical changes can be made to the existing arrangements for property purchase and compensation throughout Great Britain.

The Group has identified a number of options. One relates to the desirability of improving information flows at all stages of major infrastructure developments, and this provided the impetus for the Code of Practice. A further tranche of recommendations relates to relatively small-scale amendments to existing legislation. However, one recommendation (that a new property purchase guarantee and compensation scheme should be devised) would, if it were accepted, involve major changes to legislation. I should emphasise that this recommendation, which is born of a desire to reduce or eliminate generalised blight, does not undermine the fundamentals of the existing blight and compensation arrangements.

The Group points out that although the focus of the review was generalised blight consequent upon proposals for major infrastructure projects, responses to the discussion paper issued in June last year suggested that the most effective remedy might lie in changes to the arrangements for addressing statutory blight. However, the Group, in seeking to ameliorate the worst effects of generalised blight in this way, has not sought to reassess compulsory purchase and compensation law in its entirety, nor has it considered it consistent with its terms of reference to recommend changes to the law which are not germane to the issue of generalised blight.

The Group has delivered a detailed report on a subject of some complexity. None of the issues is clear-cut, nor are any of the options it has identified free from wider consequences. For this reason I am anxious that the report should be made widely available for discussion and comment before I, together with my ministerial colleagues in Scotland and elsewhere, give further consideration to its findings. I am therefore publishing the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Blight, the draft Code of Practice and the draft Property Purchase Guarantee and Compensation Scheme. Comments from all those with an interest are invited by 31 March.

Ministry of Defence Properties

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish guidance to those concerned with the disposal and subsequent development of surplus Ministry of Defence properties. [21665]

Mr. Caborn: Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, I have today published guidelines on the joint working of Ministry of Defence and Regional Government Offices on the disposal of surplus MOD property. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The guidelines, which have been prepared with the close cooperation of the Government Offices in the Regions, MOD and my Department, are designed to help mitigate any adverse impact on a local community which may follow the closure of a defence establishment. We hope that, by putting in place arrangements for joint working between MOD and the Government Offices, and by bringing into discussions at an early stage local authorities and other agencies which may be involved in planning the future use of redundant sites, the full potential of these sits will be realised, consistent with the principles of sustainable development. It is hoped that these arrangements will also help speed up the disposal process. It should be noted, however, that these guidelines may, in due course, need to be revised to take account of research currently underway into the development of the redundant defence estate, and to reflect the establishment of the Regional Development Agencies. For this reason, they should be seen as interim.

The guidelines, which I am sending to local authorities, bodies responsible for urban and rural regeneration, Government Offices and other interested bodies, will be freely available to other with an interest.

Merchant Shipping (Donaldson Report)

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress the Government has made implementing the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's inquiry into the prevention of pollution from merchant shipping. [21668]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have today placed copies of a progress note in the Library. This shows that the bulk of the Inquiry's recommendations have now been implemented, that the implementation of the majority of the remainder is ongoing, that some have been overtaken, and that only five are still under consideration.

Fire Safety

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes he proposes to make to the building regulations in England and Wales to improve fire safety in buildings. [21092]

Mr. Raynsford: I am issuing today a consultation paper which sets out proposed changes to the Approved Document which is published in support of Part B of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations 1991, covering fire safety matters.

The changes reflect experience of significant fires in buildings since the document was last revised as well as changes in construction practice. The text also reflects changes made to improve the clarity of the guidance in the light of queries received upon it.

Amongst the changes proposed are a requirement for sprinklers to be installed in large single storey retail premises, and restrictions on the use of certain thermoplastic cored products with good insulation properties used in food processing factories and elsewhere. Both of these proposals have been brought forward with the safety of firefighters in mind as well as building users.

Other changes include restrictions on the use of certain materials in lighting diffusers, and in respect of dwellings, additional guidance on the siting and installation of smoke alarms, including in loft conversions, and on the provision of suitable escape windows in habitable rooms.

I am placing a copy of the consultation paper in the Library, comments on these proposals have been invited by 31 March 1998.

WALES

GP Fundholders

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the payments made to general practitioner fundholders in Wales in each year since 1990–91 in respect of *(a)* management allowances and *(b)* computer costs. [19940]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Reimbursement to general practitioner fundholders in respect of expenses covered by management allowances and associated computer costs since the inception of the scheme is as follows:

£ million

	Management costs	*Computer costs*
1990–91	0.112	—
1991–92	0.518	0.588
1992–93	1.677	0.997
1993–94	3.055	1.283
1994–95	3.795	1.040
1995–96	6.707	1.268

Expenditure figures for 1996–97 are not available but provisional accounts suggest that the total sum amounts to £8.8 million for management allowance and £0.765 million for computers.

Nursery Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many four-year-olds were in *(a)* maintained reception classes, *(b)* maintained nursery classes or schools and *(c)* voluntary and private settings (i) on 23 September 1997 and (ii) in January 1996. [19939]

Mr. Hain: The information is not available in the form requested. The January 1997 School census showed 35,313 pupils aged 4 were receiving at least part-time education in maintained nursery, primary and special schools, of whom 1,017 were in nursery schools, 7,746 in nursery classes in primary schools and 136 in special schools. This compares with 35,251 at January 1996, of whom 1,044 were in nursery schools, 7,828 in nursery classes in primary schools and 131 in special schools. Nursery voucher redemption statistics indicate that 2,407 four-year-olds were receiving at least part-time nursery education in private and voluntary settings in the Summer term 1997.

Primary School Class Sizes

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage and how many primary school pupils were in classes of over *(a)* 30, *(b)* 36 and *(c)* 40 in January (i) in each local education authority in Wales and (ii) in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers relative to January 1996 in each case. [19942]

Mr. Hain: The annual January Schools Census has collected information about the number of classes by size of class but not the total number of pupils in each class. The following table shows for each local education authority area the percentages of ordinary classes in maintained primary schools in January 1996 and 1997 which had more than 30, 35 or 40 pupils.

Percentage of ordinary classes in maintained primary schools, by class size and local education authority area, January 1996 and 1997

	(A) With over 30 pupils		*(B) With over 35 pupils*		*(C) With over 40 pupils*	
Local education authority area[1]	*1996*	*1997*	*1996*	*1997*	*1996*	*1997*
Isle of Anglesey	6.1	8.7	0.4	1.1	0.4	0.4
Gwynedd	12.6	15.0	1.4	2.7	0.2	0.2
Conwy	25.4	20.3	2.7	2.0	0.0	0.0
Denbighshire	27.7	30.3	4.0	7.5	0.0	0.3
Flintshire	36.1	34.1	5.0	4.0	0.6	0.4
Wrexham	30.8	32.6	3.5	2.0	0.3	0.2
Powys	6.4	10.3	0.4	1.9	0.4	0.2
Ceredigion	5.8	5.3	2.3	1.5	0.4	0.4
Pembrokeshire	7.7	8.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Carmarthenshire	7.1	6.4	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.0
Swansea	17.7	19.7	0.1	0.9	0.0	0.0
Neath Port Talbot	14.0	18.9	0.4	1.5	0.2	0.6
Bridgend	33.7	40.2	0.9	4.0	0.0	0.0
The Vale of Glamorgan	15.2	20.1	1.0	0.5	0.0	0.0
Cardiff	24.8	29.7	0.7	1.5	0.0	0.1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	28.4	30.0	2.1	2.8	0.1	0.0
Merthyr Tydfil	27.3	24.1	1.4	2.8	0.0	0.0
Caerphilly	28.5	33.7	2.6	3.3	0.0	0.2
Blaenau Gwent	31.8	26.7	3.7	3.6	0.4	0.0
Torfaen	39.5	34.0	4.2	5.1	0.0	0.0
Monmouthshire	32.4	39.6	2.0	4.5	0.0	0.4
Newport	37.7	39.8	4.5	5.9	0.0	0.0
Wales	22.3	24.3	1.8	2.5	0.1	0.1

Source:
Schools Census.
Notes:
[1] Includes grant maintained schools.
(A) Percentages in these columns include the percentages for the relevant year shown under (B).
(B) Percentages in these columns include the percentages for the relevant year shown under (C).

From January 1998 the Schools Census will collect pupil numbers by class size.

Capital Expenditure (Swansea)

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) of 1 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *85-86*, if he will make a statement on the level of publicly funded capital expenditure in the Swansea Council area in each of the past three years. [20007]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Not all this information is held centrally but the principal sums made available or committed over the past three years totalling £75.8 million were:

	£ million
European Regional Development Fund	5.0
Welsh Development Agency	11.7
Transport Grant/Supplementary Credit Approval	36.4
SportsLot	1.3
Welsh Arts Lottery Fund	1.4
Strategic Development Scheme	12.6
Wales Tourist Board	0.3
CADW	0.1
Heritage Lottery	0.6
Top Slice Housing Supplementary Credit Approval	6.4

These figures exclude sums made available through basic credit approvals, expenditure on further and higher education and more general housing provision.

Public Transport

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on liaison between the unitary authorities and the Welsh office on the preparation of plans for public transport. [20311]

Mr. Hain: Following my decision earlier this year to expand the scope of the Transport Grant Scheme to cover integrated transport packages, I expect local authorities' plans for public transport to feature increasingly in the regular discussions of Transport Grant issues which take place between authorities and the Welsh Office.

Teachers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full time teachers there were in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector in 1997; and what estimate he has made of the numbers in each case in 2000. [20099]

Mr. Hain: At January 1997 there were 11,859 qualified full time teachers in the maintained primary sector and 11,925 in the maintained secondary sector. By the school year 2000–01 the number of pupils in the primary sector is forecast to fall while numbers in the secondary sector are expected to rise. The extent to which teacher numbers reflect these changes will be determined by decisions made by local education authorities.

Students

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students there were in further education in 1987; and what is the number for the last year for which figures are available. [20308]

Mr. Hain: The number of students on further education courses at further and higher education institutions for 1987–88 and 1996–97 are given in the following table:

Number of students on further education courses at further and higher education institutions in Wales

	1987–88 [1]	*1996–97* [2]
Number of students	69,837	144,015

Sources:
Welsh Office (Further Education Student Record) and Further Education Funding Council for Wales (Individualised Student Record).
Notes:
[1] At 1 November. Excludes the number of students at the Workers Educational Association and Young Mens Christian Association.
[2] Provisional. At 1 December. Includes the number of students at the Workers Educational Association and Young Mens Christian Association.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many (i) access and (ii) foundation course students are currently enrolled on courses in Wales which *(a)* are and *(b)* are not an integral part of a course of higher education. [20091]

Mr. Hain: For access courses, figures collected by the Welsh Funding Councils show that there were 1,804 full-time students and 1,123 part-time students (including some on very short courses) on access to higher education courses in further education sector colleges and external institutions in Wales in 1996–97. Access courses are classed as further education courses, although some are designed for entry to specific higher education courses.

Figures for foundation courses which are not parts of higher education courses are not available.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what proportion of students went on to higher education (i) within one year and (ii) within three years of having completed a foundation or access course in Wales in the last year for which figures are available; [20093]

(2) how many students currently enrolled on access and foundation courses in Wales applied for the course before 23 July; and if he will make a statement. [20092]

Mr. Hain: The information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what means-tested NHS bursaries he proposes to make available for medical and dental students in their fifth and subsequent years. [20096]

Mr. Win Griffiths: This matter is still under consideration.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the year on year revenue released from abolishing the assisted places scheme in *(a)* September 1998, *(b)* September 1999, *(c)* September 2000, *(d)* September 2001 and *(e)* September 2002; [20135]

(2) what is his estimate of the year on year cost of additional teachers as a consequence of abolishing the assisted places scheme in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01, *(d)* 2001–02 and *(e)* 2002–03. [20134]

Mr. Hain: Estimated annual revenue savings in Wales accruing from the phasing-out of the Assisted Places Scheme, for the period 1998–2002, is shown in the following table.

Year	Revenue released (£)
1998–99	1,350,000
1999–00	2,150,000
2000–01	2,700,000
2001–02	3,200,000
2002–03	3,750,000
Total	13,150,000

The number of APS pupils in Wales returning to or needing to be accommodated in maintained schools will be small and we do not foresee the need for additional teachers. The likely numbers and associated cost of additional teachers in relation to the planned reduction of infant class sizes is not yet known. The Welsh Office will commence consultation with Directors of Education in January on delivering our class sizes pledge.

Farmers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time farmers there were in Wales in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1988, and *(e)* the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [20309]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is shown as follows:

Number of full-time farmers, partners and directors in Wales[1]

	Thousands
1985	24.5
1986	24.4
1987	23.5
1988	23.8
1996	21.2

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Censues.

Note:

[1] Figures are for those persons working on main and minor farm holdings on 1 June and exclude spouses of farmers, partners and directors, even though the wives/husbands themselves may be partners or directors.

Wind Farms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites have been granted planning permission for wind farms; and if he will make a statement. [20330]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is not held centrally. Local planning authorities are primarily responsible for determining planning applications.

However, I understand that under the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation orders there are 13 operational wind farm sites in Wales and that a further 4 have planning permission.

Forest Enterprise

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time employees the Forestry Commission had in 1987; what is the current complement of staff working for Forest Enterprise; and if he will make a statement. [20307]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In 1987 the Forestry Commission employed 867 staff in Wales. The Commission currently employs 425 staff in Wales, of whom 383 work for Forest Enterprise. These figures include part-time staff so that, for example, two staff who each work half a week have been counted as one.

Further Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional funds he plans to make available for further education in Wales in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [20094]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend will shortly be considering additional funding for the further education sector in Wales in 1997–98.

Welsh Language (Patagonia)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department introduced a scheme to fund the teaching of Welsh in Patagonia. [20126]

Mr. Hain: It was announced in August 1996 that the Welsh Office would contribute towards a joint project with the British Council to help strengthen the language and cultural links between Wales and Patagonia. The project, which was intended to be of three years' duration, subject to satisfactory progress in the first year, commenced in April 1997. My right hon. Friend has recently agreed to the continuation of the project into its second year.

Blue Flag Beaches

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Blue Flag beaches there were in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* at the latest available date. [20313]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is as follows:

1995: 2

1996: 4

1997: 9.

Agricultural Employment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed in agriculture in Wales in *(a)* 1986, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* the most recent year for which figures are available. [20320]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is shown as follows:

Number of persons employed in agriculture[1]

	Thousands
1986	56.1
1987	53.8
1996	52.8

Source:
June Agricultural and Horticultural Census.
Note:
[1] Figures are for those persons working on main and minor farm holdings on 1 June and excludes spouses of farmers, partners and directors, even though the wives/husbands themselves may be partners or directors.

Acid Rain

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to deal with the effects of acid rain; and if he will make a statement. [20310]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The UK was one of the first countries to ratify the Second Sulphur Protocol under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution. This commits the UK to reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide by 80 per cent. by 2010 compared with 1980 levels. The Government are currently taking an active part in negotiations in the EU on a Strategy to further combat acid deposition. This was discussed on 16 December at a meeting of EU Environment Ministers.

Acid rain is an on-going transboundary issue and only by concerted action across Europe shall we deal effectively with the problem. The final report of the Welsh Acid Water Survey carried out in 1995–96 and commissioned by the Welsh Office and the Environment Agency was published on 26 November. The Survey indicates that although there are signs that the benefits of emission controls are being felt in the environment the recovery of sensitive ecosystems has been slow.

NHS Bureaucracy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the sums saved in the NHS in Wales from reducing bureaucracy to date. [20728]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The suspension of the 8th wave of GP Fundholding released £1.9 million immediately.

Trusts and authorities are working towards recurrent savings of £1.8 million and £2.3 million respectively. Information on the realisation of these savings is not collected in year. Figures for the whole year will be available from the 1997–98 audited accounts, which will be available in August 1998.

NHS Contracts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to change the system of annual contracts in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [20732]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Guidance has already been issued to NHS Wales encouraging health authorities, trusts and GPs to enter into agreements which go beyond one year's duration.

A White Paper will be issued shortly which will provide more detailed proposals on the abolition of the internal market and on the mechanisms that will be introduced to replace it.

Nutrition

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for improving nutritional standards. [20730]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Included in the targets my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has set NHS Wales is to work with others to increase by 2002 the proportion of people who eat green vegetables, salads and fresh fruit most days.

The Health Promotion Authority for Wales whose role is to promote good health and prevent ill-health is also working towards improving nutrition in Wales. Activities include the provision of information to assist people to attain a healthy weight for their height; an examination of nutritional policies and standards in NHS hospitals; the monitoring of dietary interventions projects in schools, such as healthy tuck shops; and surveys every two years of adults' and childrens' dietary intake to identify trends and to highlight needs for intervention.

In addition the Government intend that the Food Standards Agency, when constituted, will have an important role across the UK in providing advice on certain aspects of nutrition.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients have been waiting for treatment for more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [20729]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Latest published figures for Health Authorities show that at the end of September 1997, 90 per cent. of Welsh residents had waited less than 12 months for inpatient or day-case hospital treatment; 6,810 people (10 per cent. of those on the waiting list) had waited more than 12 months.

Telemedicine

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to encourage the use of telemedicine. [20731]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Wales has been at the forefront of developing telemedicine; an experimental project in North Powys showed the benefits to patients and practitioners from having electronic access to distant specialists. To take this work further, the Welsh Office is supporting the Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust in its "Keeping Care Local" project. This project will review the full range of trust services to find ways of using telemedicine technology to benefit much larger numbers of patients. The results will be published at a conference and exhibition on telemedicine in Cardiff on 27 and 28 April 1998. I expect health authorities and trusts to learn from such work and to exploit opportunities in their own areas.

SCOTLAND

Water and Sewerage Authorities

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the external finance limits which will apply to the Scottish water and sewerage authorities in 1998–99 and in the following two years. [20741]

Mr. Macdonald: The External Finance Limit (EFL) for the three water authorities has been set at £185.956 million for 1998–99. Indicative EFLs for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 will be determined in the light of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The allocation of EFLs to each authority in 1998–99 will be: East Authority £58.985 million, North Authority £55.582 million, and West Authority £71.389 million.

Council Tax

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will amend the law to remove students from joint and several liability for council tax payments. [20351]

Mr. Macdonald: We intend to amend the council tax liability rules to remove students from joint and several liability from council tax as soon as a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

Housing Association Rents

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total gross revenue from housing association rents in the last year; and what proportion of this was met by housing benefit. [20747]

Mr. Macdonald: The available information is as follows. In 1995–96, gross revenue from housing association rents in respect of housing associations registered in Scotland is estimated by Scottish Homes to have been £180 million. The Department of Social Security, which has responsibility for housing benefit, estimates that in the same year tenants of housing associations in Scotland—whether registered or not—received in total around £78 million of housing benefit.

Starter Pistols

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's policy on the use of starter pistols; and what representations he has received from *(a)* the police and *(b)* representatives of athletic associations on this subject. [20800]

Mr. McLeish: The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 contains an exemption which allows the possession of starting pistols by certain officials for use in the starting of athletics races. These pistols must be held on a firearm certificate which will be issued only where the police are satisfied that the individual requires the pistol because of the status of the athletics meetings at which he officiates. Most starting pistols can fire only blank rounds.

No representations have been received from the police on this issue. The British Athletic Federation sought the retention of the exemption when the Government announced their intention to ban small-calibre pistols. The Federation is currently funding research into an effective alternative to the starting pistol.

Marine Minerals

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the review of licensing arrangements for the dredging of marine minerals. [21620]

Mr. Macdonald: Currently the Crown Estate, as owners of the seabed, issue licences for minerals dredging. A prerequisite to the issue of a licence is a favourable "Government View" (GV) issued by the Scottish Office which co-ordinates and considers the views of Government Departments and responses to public consultation on the proposals before issuing a GV.

After consideration of all the responses to earlier consultation on the review of the GV procedure, we have concluded that the way forward is to introduce statutory procedures for the better regulation of marine minerals dredging in Scotland to replace the non-statutory GV procedure. The new arrangements would be based on the Secretary of State for Scotland being responsible for administering, monitoring and enforcing the new dredging consents; those consents being subject to regular review; the costs of administering the new statutory procedures being recovered from operators; and a statutory right of appeal against refusal. Although to date there has only been limited dredging activity in Scotland, pending legislation an interim scheme will be introduced and administered by the Scottish Office in place of the Crown Estate's current role in the GV process.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the first annual report of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency will be published. [21621]

Mr. Dewar: I laid a copy of SEPA's First Annual Report and Accounts before both Houses on 16 December. It contains details of the progress made by SEPA in its first year of operation, and a copy of its accounts, which cover the first 18 months of its existence. I am pleased to see that SEPA has made a good start and has done very well to pull together the very diverse bodies from which it was formed. I am also satisfied that SEPA is now on a firm financial footing and can move forward confidently to bring about the continuing improvement of Scotland's environment which we all wish to see.

Water Authorities

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the new appointments to the three Scottish water authorities. [21666]

Mr. Dewar: I have made the following appointments to the three Scottish Water Authorities:

North of Scotland Water Authority

Councillor Colin Rennie, Councillor Joan Easten (re-appointment), Nigel Hawkins, Andrew Lewis (re-appointment), Nicolas McAndrew (re-appointment).

East of Scotland Water Authority

Councillor Robert Cairns, Robin Bell (re-appointment), David Bleiman, John Broadfoot, Councillor Jeanette Burness, Councillor Thomas Dair, Councillor Ann Dickson (re-appointment).

West of Scotland Water Authority

Norman Berry (re-appointment), Councillor Gerald Carroll, David Gray (re-appointment), Jane McKay, Councillor David Munn.

Industrial Tribunal Decisions

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what estimate he has made of the number of industrial tribunal decisions which are fully complied with within a period of two months from the tribunal decision; [21171]

(2) what plans he has to introduce procedures to allow for easier enforcement of industrial tribunal decisions; and if he will make a statement; [21173]

(3) what mechanisms are available to ensure the enforcement of industrial tribunal decisions. [21172]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney).

CABINET OFFICE

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will provide a list of the areas on which he is prepared to answer questions in respect of the Millennium Experience and a list of the areas on which he is not prepared to answer questions. [21327]

Mr. Mandelson: I aim to answer all questions on my responsibilities to the best of my ability.

Millennium Experience

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister without Portfolio, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *388*, concerning his meeting with the French Minister for European Affairs on 16 September, if any civil servants were present at the meeting; and if he will list the subjects discussed. [21351]

Mr. Mandelson: We discussed the Jobs Summit and French ideas for "Euro-X". Civil Servants were present.

DEFENCE

Joint Fighter Project

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the Government are making to the United States joint fighter project; and when the aircraft is expected to enter service. [13860]

Mr. Spellar: The United Kingdom Government is contributing $200 million as a collaborative partner in the concept demonstration phase of the United States Joint Strike Fighter project. The aircraft is scheduled to enter service with the United States service in 2008. Procurement plans will, however, be considered as part of the Strategic Defence Review.

Defence Procurement Industry

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence procurement jobs there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales; and if he will make a statement. [20331]

Mr. Spellar: I assume the hon. Member's question refers to jobs in the Procurement Executive (PE) of the Ministry of Defence. At 1 April 1997 there were 6,199 PE posts in England and one PE post in Wales. The single post in Wales was transferred to England at the end of August 1997.

Challenger 2 Tanks

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the *(a)* first and *(b)* last of the Challenger 2 tanks are expected to enter service; what is the current yearly delivery schedule; and what is the life expectancy of a single tank of the class. [20075]

Mr. Spellar: The first delivery of a production Challenger 2 main battle tank took place in August 1994. After reliability problems were confirmed in October 1995, no further tanks were accepted beyond the 36 already delivered. The successful completion of the Production Reliability Growth Trials in November 1997 means that deliveries of tanks are due to resume in January 1998 with the aim of completing deliveries to the first regiment in June 1998. Deliveries are planned to continue until February 2002. The current schedule of contract deliveries for the 386 tanks is as follows:

1994–95: 9

1995–96: 27

1996–97: 0

1997–98: 23

1998–99: 106

1999–00: 76

2000–01: 76

2001–02: 69.

The current planned in-service life of a Challenger 2 tank is 30 years.

Trawlers

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *171*, concerning intelligence gathered by trawlers *(a)* how many trawlers were used and from which ports *(b)* when this practice eased and *(c)* what financial arrangements were made to recompense the officers and crew used in such activities. [20355]

Dr. Reid: Three trawlers were used for specific intelligence gathering operations against the former Soviet Navy in the mid 1960s and early 1970s. These operations ceased in 1973. All of the vessels were owned by a Hull based company and almost certainly operated from that port. For those operations conducted in the 1960s, the owner was guaranteed compensation for loss of catch resulting from any diversion from the trawler's usual fishing grounds. Available records do not indicate whether similar arrangement existed for those carried out in the 1970s.

Radiation Dose Records

Mr Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made to date on entering the pre-1979 personal radiation dose records onto an electronic database for ex-employees, at the Chatham Dockyard; when this is expected to be completed; and when and in what format the data are to be published. [20465]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has completed the process of scanning onto the Dosimetry Information Database all the available dosimetry documents from the former Dockyard at Chatham that are not part of an Approved Dosimetry Service. This includes all such records from before 1979. The database complements the approved Dosimetry Service records and will allow searches for all of the information relating to an individual to be carried out much more speedily than in the past.

The database contains personal data and it will not therefore be published.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the people who have registered for the national counselling scheme in respect of exposure to radiation were informed that their adaption dose records could not be found; and, of these, how many were designated as *(a)* classified persons and *(b)* approved scheme workers under the approved dosimetry scheme that operated at their respective places of employment at the time of their employment. [20463]

Mr. Spellar: To date we have been unable to find radiation dose records for thirty four applicants to the national counselling scheme. Of these applicants none has been identified as a classified person and at least three were approved scheme workers.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the individuals who have registered for the counselling scheme announced on 4 June, for whom no dose records could be found, were designated *(a)* classified persons and *(b)* approved scheme workers under the approved dosimetry scheme which operated at the Chatham Dockyard at the time of their employment. [20464]

Mr. Spellar: None of the individuals who have registered for the counselling scheme announced on 4 June and for whom no dose records can be found has been identified as a designated classified person. At least three were approved scheme workers.

Navy Officers

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *171*, if he will make a statement on the scheme whereby Royal Navy officers gained sea-going experience in deep sea trawlers. [20354]

Dr. Reid: It has been long standing practice to send junior RN officers to sea on Merchant ships. In the 1950s this was extended to include deep sea trawlers. The aim was to provide sea going experience and to foster good relationships between the fleets. While the Royal Navy/Merchant Navy Voyage Scheme continues to this day, available records indicate that the use of trawlers ceased in the mid-1970s.

Fleet Maintenance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current allocated work loads from his Department for *(a)* Devonport, *(b)* Rosyth and *(c)* the Royal Navy's Fleet Maintenance and Repair Organisation. [20684]

Mr. Spellar: The MOD allocated workloads for each of Devonport, Rosyth and the Fleet Maintenance and Repair Organisation (FMRO), for the current year, 1997–98, are shown below. These figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and are based on MOD planning assumptions only. The actual workloads will depend on the outcome of contract negotiations.

	Manweeks
Devonport	76,000
Rosyth	77,000
FMRO	26,000

Service Personnel (Compensation)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his comprehensive review of the arrangements for compensating service personnel or their dependants and for the payment of death and invalidity pension benefits will *(a)* commence and *(b)* report to Ministers; when he expects to publish the results and the consultation document; if the review will consider the arrangements applicable to (i) civilian Ministry of Defence employees and (ii) private sector contractors' staff where death or injury was attributable to service supporting the uniformed military in training or on operations; and if he will make a statement. [21122]

Dr. Reid: The review of the arrangements for compensating Service personnel who suffer death or injury as a result of their military service which was announced on 8 December will commence in January. The aim will be to complete the review in time for the publication of a consultative document next Summer. The review will be limited to consideration of the compensation arrangements for Service personnel and their dependants.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average annual cost of storing spent nuclear submarine nuclear fuel rods at the British Nuclear Fuels plant at Sellafield. [21216]

Dr. Reid: The average annual running cost of storing spent fuel from nuclear submarines at BNFL Sellafield is £1.4 million.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the average annual costs of storing decommissioned nuclear powered submarines at Rosyth and Devonport. [21218]

Mr. Spellar: The average cost of storing the Royal Navy's fully decommissioned nuclear powered submarines at Rosyth and Devonport is £93,000 per vessel.

Naval Establishments

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the primary roles and functions of the Royal Navy establishment at Northwood. [21211]

Dr. Reid: The primary role and function of HMS Warrior, the Royal Navy establishment at Northwood, is to provide the support and infrastructure to the other units resident at the Northwood HQ. These other units are: The Commander in Chief Fleet, The Flag Officer Submarines; Headquarters 11/18 Group RAF; The UK Permanent Joint Headquarters and a major NATO headquarters.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the annual running costs of the Royal Navy establishment at Northwood. [21212]

Dr. Reid: The estimated running cost for HMS Warrior, the Royal Navy establishment at Northwood for 1997–98, including Service Pay, is some £17.5 million.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason figures are not available for the perceived religious and community origin of serving members of the Royal Irish Regiment General Service Batallion. [20323]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Under the terms of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Acts 1976 and 1989, my Department is required to monitor the religious/community background of employees wholly or mainly employed in Northern Ireland. The General Service soldiers of the Royal Irish Regiment are not wholly or mainly employed in Northern Ireland and are not subject to the Act. There is therefore no requirement to monitor the religious/community background of this or any other General Service Battalion and the information requested is not monitored centrally in Northern Ireland. However, my Department estimate that the perceived religious/community origin of the General Service Battalion is broadly 70–75 per cent. Protestant and just over 20 per cent. Roman Catholic.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will approximate to district council constituencies the field of operations of each battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service. [20325]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* In broad terms, the information requested is set out below:

3rd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment: Craigavon, Lisburn, Banbridge

4th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment: Fermanagh

5th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment: Magherafelt, Limavady, Coleraine, Moyle, Ballymoney

7th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment: Belfast, North Down, Castlereagh

8th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment: Armagh

9th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment: Lisburn, Antrim.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in the last month for which figures are available how many Royal Irish Regiment patrols were *(a)* accompanied by the RUC and *(b)* unaccompanied. [20287]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The information requested for the period of 10 November to 8 December 1997 (inclusive) is set out as follows:

Battalion	*Number of patrols accompanied by RUC*	*Number of patrols unaccompanied by RUC*
3rd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	58	38
4th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	230	0
5th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	11	13
7th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	0	0
8th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	175	58
9th Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment	50	0

A patrol is defined as any foot or mobile patrol in support of the RUC, regardless of size or duration. Patrols conducted by the Army for local security around bases are not included.

West Indies Guardship

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 1997, *Official Report,* column *383,* concerning the West Indies Guardship, where and when discussions took place with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development; and if minutes were taken at the meeting. [21292]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development had informal discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about this matter in the precincts of the House. The date of these discussions has not been recorded and no minutes were taken.

HEALTH

Drugs (Licensing)

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are applied to new drugs to assess their effectiveness before they receive a licence for general use. [17032]

Ms Jowell: The marketing authorisation (the licensing) of all medicines throughout the European Union is governed by the Rules Governing Medicinal Products in the European Union, in particular, Council Directive 65/65/EEC. Under these rules a licence application is refused if the medicinal product is harmful in the normal conditions of use, or if its therapeutic efficacy is lacking or is insufficiently substantiated, or if there are concerns about its qualitative and quantitative composition. In this context "therapeutic efficacy" and "clinical effectiveness" are judged to be synonymous.

Bone Marrow Donors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to encourage people from ethnic minorities to volunteer as bone marrow donors. [19170]

Mr. Boateng: Bone marrow donors are recruited through two organisations. The British Bone Marrow Register is funded through the national health service and recruits from blood donors at blood donation sessions. The Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust is a charity funded by voluntary giving and recruits donors from the general public through local and national publicity campaigns. Both of these organisations, as well as some local campaigns, are working to encourage donation from ethnic minority groups.

The Anthony Nolan Trust has been particularly active in this field, both nationally and locally. It has produced leaflets and posters to encourage donations from the African-Caribbean community and has also worked to encourage people from the Greek and Turkish communities to come forward as donors. This year the Department funded through the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust a commercial to be included in Asian video films to appeal to the Asian community to donate blood and bone marrow.

There have also been local campaigns. In Birmingham, for example, transplant co-ordinators have produced a multi-ethnic poster to encourage donation generally (the poster features the organ donation card) by people from ethnic minority groups.

More generally, there are continuing campaigns to encourage positive attitudes towards tissue donation. During this year, the Department is promoting a wide range of measures designed to increase the number of regular blood donors through raising awareness of the need to maintain supplies of blood to hospitals. This includes the launch this year of a new 3 to 5 year publicity strategy, designed to increase the current donor base. As the British Bone Marrow Register recruits solely from those who are blood donors any success in increasing blood donation should also lead to increased numbers registering as potential bone marrow donors.

NHS Trust Hospitals

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current total of NHS trust hospitals. [19557]

Mr. Milburn: Prior to 1991 information was available centrally on the number of hospitals with residential facilities. Data ceased to be collected at unit level in 1991.

The number of national health service hospital trusts in England is 399, although a trust may consist of more than one hospital.

Dental Treatment (Deaths)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by NHS Executive region, the total number of children who have died under general anaesthetic for dental treatment for each year since 1979. [20371]

Mr. Milburn: The data held centrally are not broken down by region. The table covers children under 15 to 1982 and under 16 thereafter.

Deaths of children associated with general anaesthesia for dental treatment

	Number
1979	0
1980	2
1981	1
1982	1
1983	1
1984	1
1985	4
1986	2
1987	2
1988	0
1989	3
1990	0
1991	0
1992	4
1993	1
1994	0
1995	0
1996	1
1997	1

Ectopic Pregnancies

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have *(a)* been admitted to hospital with and *(b)* died as a result of ectopic pregnancies in each of the last 20 years. [20677]

Ms Jowell: The information available is in the table.

England

	Deaths from ectopic pregnancies[1]	*Admissions to hospital*[2]
1977	9	4,050[3]
1978	6	3,950[3]
1979	3	3,940
1980	10	3,570
1981	5	3,930
1982	2	4,270
1983	6	4,700
1984	3	4,830
1985	3	4,640
1986	2	[4]n/a
1987	4	n/a
1988	4	n/a
1989	6	n/a
1990	6	8,988[5]
1991	4	9,231
1992	4	9,978
1993	1	10,074
1994	5	9,694
1995	6	9,722
1996	4	9,525

[1] Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS).

[2] Source: Department of Health, Statistics Division SD2B.

[3] England and Wales figures only available.

[4] Information from 1979 to 1985 is obtained from the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE). The Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) system replaced HIPE and 1989–90 is the earliest year for which HES data were published.

[5] Hospital statistics from 1990 are for financial year ending 31 March.

n/a = not available.

Figures for 1977–78 use the International Classification of Diseases code Eighth Revision, (ICD 8) category 631; 1979–96 uses the International Classification of Disease code Ninth Revision (ICD 9) category 633; and 1995–96 uses the International Classification of Disease code Tenth Revision (ICD 10) category 000.

Dental Services

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received in response to the de-registering of patients who have not visited their dentist within the last 15 months; and if he will make a statement. [21322]

Mr. Milburn: From 1 September 1996, the registration period for both adult continuing care and child capitation was harmonised to provide patients with a period of continuing dental care for 15 months following each course of treatment. The aim of the changes was to improve value for money by focusing payments to dentists on those patients receiving active care from them.

Patients lapse from dentists' lists only if they have not seen their dentists since they registered. This is so, irrespective of the length of the registration period. Patients who attend their dentist at least every 15 months, have their registration period rolled forward automatically for another 15 months when they attend. They will notice no difference from the changes. Less regular attenders are still fully entitled to NHS dental treatment.

The changes to the registration periods were agreed with the British Dental Association (BDA) before they were implemented in September 1996. The BDA has recently changed its position, and has asked the Department to look again at the length of the registration periods.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take to encourage patients to register with their dentists before the Government regulations relating to patients who have not visited their dentist within the last 15 months are enforced. [21324]

Mr. Milburn: Patients who attend their dentist regularly will not be affected by the change in registration period. Less regular attenders are still fully entitled to National Health Service dental treatment, and are free to register at any time with a dentist willing to accept them.

Cannabis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to publish his response to the conclusions of the BMA on the value of medicinal cannabis. [21047]

Ms Jowell: We have no plans to publish the reply sent to the British Medical Association (BMA). Department of Health officials will meet representatives of the BMA in the new year to discuss their report "The therapeutic uses of cannabis".

Tobacco

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will prevent the sale of tobacco products by anyone younger than the minimum age at which those products may legally be purchased. [20410]

Ms Jowell: The Government currently have no plans to do so.

Mentally Handicapped People

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the terms of reference are for the evaluation being conducted for his Department of residential and village community provision for people with a mental handicap; who is conducting the study; how much it will cost if the work was put out to tender; and when the main findings are expected. [20411]

Mr. Boateng: The evaluation consists of two phases. The first phase was in two parts. First, a review of literature on residential provision for people with learning disabilities. The terms of reference were

"to assess the state of knowledge about effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different forms of residential accommodation for people with learning disabilities".

Secondly, an analysis of available information on the costs of village communities. The terms of reference were

"to analyse and compare any information which is readily available on the financial costs of village communities and other forms of residential provision for people with learning disabilities".

Professor Eric Emerson of Hester Adrian Research Centre, University of Manchester, successfully competed for the contract for the first phase of the research which cost £26,471. The results of the first phase were published in July 1996 and distributed to social services departments and chief executives of health authorities.

The second phase consists of two related parts. The first will look at a sample of 300 people with learning disabilities living in residential or village communities, and 300 people with learning disabilities living in small scale community-based residential services. In the second part, more detailed information will be collected on two smaller matched sub-samples of people with profound multiple learning disabilities living in residential or village communities, and small scale community-based residential services.

Analyses of the data will focus upon: (1) describing and comparing the characteristics of the people served, the types of services received, the costs of services received and the outcomes associated with the two approaches to residential provision; and (2) examining the inter-relationships between the characteristics of the people served, the types of services received, the costs of services received and the resulting outcomes within and across the two types of provision.

To avoid any undue delay in the start of the second phase of the research, and because he successfully completed the first phase, Professor Eric Emerson of the Hester Adrian Research Centre, University of Manchester, was approached on a single tender basis to take the second phase forward. Professor Martin Knapp of the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the London School of Economics is undertaking the economic aspects of the research.

The study was commissioned in December 1996 at a cost to the Department of £274,464. Main findings from the study are expected in December 1998.

HIV/AIDS

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his plans to increase the efficacy of HIV/AIDS educational initiatives to young people. [20717]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health has a contract with the Health Education Authority to undertake HIV/AIDS health promotion work for the general population. Most of these initiatives are currently aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds and provide information about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and how to avoid them. The Government are committed to ensuring that such work is effective, evidence-based and properly evaluated through the use of research and pre-testing.

Ministers have recently announced the establishment of a Task Group which will look at Sex and Relationships Education. It will support the continued development of sex and relationships education in schools and youth settings. The Department for Education and Employment will be fully involved.

NHS Trusts (East Sussex)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages of merging NHS trusts serving East Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [21354]

Mr. Milburn: No proposals for the merger of National Health Service trusts within East Sussex have been received. Mergers arising from local decisions will be considered on their merits, on the basis of demonstrable benefits in health and healthcare, and savings in administration.

Long-stay Facilities

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *162-63*, on long-stay facilities, if he will provide the same information for each year since 1989. [13056]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 November 1997]:* The average daily number of available beds in the three main service areas where long stay provision is concentrated are set out in the tables.

I regret that the information provided in my reply of 15 July 1997 at columns *162-63* was incorrect. The figure in the table for 1993–94 under the heading Learning Disability reads 17,000. The correct figure is 16,000 as shown in the table. The figure for 1994–95 reads 14,000. This too is incorrect and should read 13,000.

Table 1: Average daily number of available beds in NHS hospitals in England since 1988–89

	Sector		
	Geriatric	*Mental health*	*Learning disability*
1988–89	51,000	63,000	30,000
1989–90	49,000	59,000	26,000
1990–91	46,000	55,000	23,000
1991–92	42,000	50,000	21,000
1992–93	40,000	47,000	19,000
1993–94	37,000	44,000	16,000

Table 1: Average daily number of available beds in NHS hospitals in England since 1988–89

	Sector		
	Geriatric	*Mental health*	*Learning disability*
1994–95	37,000	42,000	13,000
1995–96	34,000	39,000	13,000
1996–97	32,000	38,000	10,000

Source:
DH form KHO3 1988–89 onwards.

For 1996–97, beds in Residential care wards, managed by the National Health Service, were counted separately for the first time. These figures are not included in table 1.

Table 2: Average daily number of available beds in Residential care wards managed by the NHS in England 1996–97

	Sector		
	Mental illness	*Learning disability*	*Other*
1996–97	1,000	3,000	0

Source:
DH form KH03 1996–97.
Note:
"O" denotes "500" or less.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus Food Scheme

Ms Stuart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is the Government's intention to participate in the EU Surplus Food Scheme in 1998; and if he will make a statement. [21658]

Mr. Rooker: Yes. The European Commission has allocated the United Kingdom some £20.3 million to operate the Scheme during 1998. Approximately 10 million cans of stewed steak will be made available to local authorities and to charitable and other non-profit making organisations to distribute to those on Income Support, Family Credit, Jobseekers Allowance (income based only) or Disability Working Allowance, the homeless and destitute and those living in welfare hostels.

The Scheme will involve only UK intervention beef which contains no offal and will be from animals killed when they were under thirty months of age and is no different from the meat currently available in the shops.

I am pleased that this surplus beef is to be put to good use.

Animal Feed

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has received from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on the practice of feeding animal products to animals of the same species; and if he will make a statement. [21657]

Dr. John Cunningham: At my request, at its meeting on 2 December the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee considered the practice of feeding animal

by-products to animals of the same species. The committee's advice is being published in full, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

The committee did not consider that there was an immediate risk from intraspecies feeding. However, they thought it possible that TSEs might arise spontaneously in any species with a prion protein gene, and that if this were the case the practice of recycling waste as feed within a species could spread any resultant disease. The committee describes the risk here as small, but considered that it could not be discounted completely.

The committee has recommended that the Government develop a strategy to remove this risk, taking account of practical enforcement considerations and alternative disposal option, and discuss it with EC partners. Although the risk is small, I intend to accept this recommendation on a precautionary basis.

Essentially this means that the current practices of processing certain types of waste containing porcine material and feeding it as swill to pigs, and using poultry and feather meal as high protein ration for poultry, will have to end. Before legislating, however, I shall, as advised, consider the alternative routes for disposing of such waste. I am currently conducting a review of national animal waste legislation and intend to issue proposed legislation for consultation early in the New Year. That will set out our proposals in respect of pig swill subject to any further discussions in the European Community. I shall use that opportunity to ask for comments on the other issue raised by SEAC's advice. Subject to those comments, I also envisage bringing forward legislation to ban the recycling of poultry meals as poultry feed, but want to sound out Community partners first.

This action to avoid any possibility that a risk which the committee described as "small" and "potential" means that consumers will continue to enjoy the highest possible protection against the risks from TSEs, and give the assurance that pig and poultry products remain TSE free.

Mussel Seed Licences

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will continue to make available licences to take mussel seed stock for the purpose of ongrowing; and if he will make a statement. [21663]

Mr. Morley: This year licences have been made available on request to registered shellfish farmers in England and Wales to enable them to collect wild mussel seed for cultivation on registered shellfish farms. We shall continue to make such licences available and will be discussing the detailed arrangements with the shellfish industry and with other interests. Vessels licensed in this way will not count against the United Kingdom's objectives under the EU's Multi-Annual Guidance Programme.

British Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on progress on setting up the British Cattle Movement Service at Workington. [21661]

Mr. Rooker: I am glad to report that refurbishment work has been completed at three out of the four buildings at the British Cattle Movement Service site at Workington. One building was handed over to MAFF in November, and a further two are being completed and handed over today. Work is now underway to equip these buildings ready for occupation. The fourth building will be handed over next year.

I am also pleased to announce that we have appointed a Director of the British Cattle Movement Service following an open competition. He is David Evans, currently Assistant Regional Director at the MAFF Regional Service Centre at Carlisle.

These developments are milestones in the important task of setting up the British Cattle Movement Service, which will run the new computerised cattle tracing system for Great Britain.

Fisheries (Quota Hopping)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures his Department is taking in respect of the purchase of quota-hopping fishing vessels or their licences. [20261]

Mr. Morley: Under EC law, Ministers cannot discriminate against nationals from other Member States who are entitled to purchase British registered fishing vessels and to acquire the licence entitlements arising from such vessels.

Any qualifying UK registered vessel can apply to decommissioning schemes.

Animal Welfare and Specified Risk Materials

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the *(a)* welfare and *(b)* specified risk materials regulations in other EU countries relative to those obtaining in the United Kingdom. [20248]

Mr. Morley: *(a)* On animal welfare, the Member States of the European Union are obliged to give effect to the various requirements of EU law in relation to animal welfare on farm, in transit, at market and at slaughter, as well as to the provisions of the related Council of Europe Conventions.

(b) Controls on specified material from cattle, similar to those which exist in the UK, are carried out in France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal. France, the Netherlands and Spain have controls on specified material from sheep and goats.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he proposes to make changes to the arrangements for the licensing of United Kingdom registered fishing vessels when implementing the United Kingdom's latest multi-annual guidance programme (MAGP IV); and if he will make a statement. [21659]

Mr. Morley: The existing arrangements for the licensing of fishing vessels will continue to operate subject to certain changes which are set out below.

Segmentation of the Fleet

The UK's multi annual guidance programme will set for each segment of our fishing fleet objectives to be met by 31 December 2001. There will be eight segments as follows:

pelagic trawls and purse seines

beam trawls

demersal and nephrop trawls and seines

lines and nets

shell-fish mobile gear

shell-fish fixed gear

distant waters subdivided according to whether the vessels are exclusively or predominately active in non EU waters.

small scale coastal vessels under 10 metres.

The means by which these objectives are achieved will vary from segment to segment. They may involve restrictions and/or reductions in fishing effort or capacity or a combination of both.

From 1 January 1998, each fishing vessel will be assigned to a single segment, based on the principal activity recorded as being undertaken in 1996. Vessels which are new to the fleet or those which recorded no fishing activity in 1996 have been assigned to segments on the basis of earlier recorded activity or on the basis of other information available to Departments. The allocation of vessels to segments will be reviewed during 1998 to take account of fishing activity up to and including 1997. Departments will take into account information provided by owners where:

(i) the segmentation has been based on no recorded fishing activity;

(ii) a vessel is new to the fleet;

(iii) a vessel has engaged in a licence transaction as a result of which its fishing opportunities have materially changed.

Such information must be provided by 31 March 1998.

Once a fishing vessel has been assigned to a particular segment its capacity and fishing activity will continue to be recorded against that segment until further notice. Vessel owners will however be free to change the pattern of their fishing effort within any segment subject to any limitations posed by their fishing vessel licences.

Restrictions on Fishing for Pelagic Species

From 1 April 1998 UK registered fishing vessels eligible to fish for more than 500 tonnes of pelagic species—herring, mackerel, horse mackerel, pilchards, sprats and blue whiting—will be restricted to existing vessels in the fleet which on 17 December 1997: *(a)* held an existing category A pelagic (purse seine or freezer trawler) licence; or *(b)* held an existing category A licence and caught at least 500 tonnes of pelagic species in any of the four years 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997.

Eligible vessels other than purse seiners and freezer trawlers will have their existing licences replaced by a new category A pelagic (trawler) licence. Any vessel which already holds a beam trawler licence will be permitted to continue to fish by that method.

Vessels holding category A pelagic (purse seine or freezer trawler) licences or category A pelagic (trawler) licences will also be able to fish for demersal species and pelagic species other than herring, mackerel, horse mackerel, pilchards, sprats and blue whiting, subject to complying with any licence or other restrictions in force or that may be imposed.

Any person who would not qualify for a category A pelagic (trawler) licence under the criteria outlined above but who considers that they should be issued with such a licence must advise the Fisheries Departments by 31 January 1998. Such applicants must: *(a)* have introduced a registered and licensed vessel into the UK fleet during 1997 with the intention of catching more than 500 tonnes of herring, mackerel, horse mackerel, sprats, pilchards or blue whiting; or *(b)* have entered into an enforceable financial commitment on or before 17 December 1997 to introduce a fishing vessel intended to catch more than 500 tonnes of herring, mackerel, horse mackerel, sprats, pilchards or blue whiting.

Documentary evidence of such an intention or enforceable financial commitment must also be presented to the Fisheries Departments by 31 January 1998.

Ring Fencing of Pelagic Licences

From 1 April 1998 vessels holding a category A pelagic (purse seine or freezer trawler) licence or a category A pelagic (trawler) licence will be ring fenced. Anyone wishing to introduce a new vessel into the pelagic fleet or to modify an existing pelagic vessel may only do so by acquiring an entitlement to a pelagic (purse seine or freezer trawler) licence or to a pelagic (trawler) licence. Within the ring fence it will not be possible to undertake a single licence transfer which involves the placement of a pelagic (trawler) licence on a pelagic freezer trawler or purse seiner.

Existing capacity penalties—10 per cent. for licence transfers and 20 per cent. for licence aggregations—will continue to apply to all licence transactions within the pelagic ring fence, as will existing restrictions on engine power and tonnage. However from 1 April 1998 the replacement or modification of purse seiners or pelagic freezer trawlers will be subject to a zero capacity penalty where single licence transfers occur or to a 10 per cent. capacity penalty where the aggregation of licences occurs, Any freezer trawler must be capable of processing at least 30 tonnes of pelagic species per day.

As from today it will no longer be possible to aggregate white fish licences with pelagic (purse seine or freezer trawler) licences to undertake minor engine modifications. The provision to park licences on purse seiners or freezer trawlers for up to two years pending their replacement or modification will also be terminated from this date.

As at present there will be no restrictions on category A pelagic licences being downgraded to ordinary category A white fish licences.

The Recording of Engine Power on Fishing Vessel Licences

For all licence transactions which will take place from 1 January 1999 the Fisheries Departments propose that the engine power to be recorded on the fishing vessel licence shall be the maximum continuous engine power that is capable of being generated by the vessel's engine. It is further proposed that this provision be extended on 1 January 2000 to all vessels licensed before 31 December 1998. Where fishing vessels engines have been permanently derated, the derated engine power will be treated as the maximum continuous engine power.

In parallel with the arrangements set out in the previous paragraph the Fisheries Departments will be undertaking random checks to ensure that the maximum continuous engine power of fishing vessels is not greater than that which is stated on the fishing vessel licence.

Review of the Licensing Arrangements

The present system of licensing has evolved over a long period following the agreement of the Common Fisheries Policy in 1982. It is the mechanism through which the Fisheries Departments seek to regulate both fishing activity and the size and structure of the UK fleet. Over the years the system has become highly complex in terms of the number of different licences that are issued, the conditions which are attached to the licences, the arrangements for transferring and aggregating licences, and the operation of capacity penalties and tonnage and engine power constraints which together exert downward pressure on the size of the UK fleet. Although a number of changes to the licensing arrangements have been announced today, I believe that it would be beneficial to undertake a more detailed review of the operation of the arrangements to establish whether they are necessary and if so how they may be improved. In undertaking such a review it is important to take account of the knowledge and expertise that lies within the fishing industry. To this end I propose that a series of

meetings should be held with representatives of the principal fishermen's organisations and that a report on the conclusions reached be presented to Ministers. This forum will also be invited to consider what arrangements might be made to accommodate the recording of maximum continuous engine power on fishing vessel licences.

SEAC (Membership)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the scientists who sit on SEAC indicating other organisations for which they work. [20362]

Mr. Rooker: The table lists the current members of SEAC and the organisations for which they work.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to our hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan) on 24 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *710*, which declared SEAC members' commercial and non-commercial interests.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

Chairman:

Professor J. R. Pattison—Professor of Medical Microbiology and Dean of the University College, London Medical School.

Deputy Chairman:

Dr. R. G. Will—Consultant Neurologist at Western General Hospital (Edinburgh) and Head of the National CJD Surveillance Unit.

Members:

Professor J. W. Almond—Virologist and Professor of Microbiology at the University of Reading.

Mr. R. Bradley CBE—Veterinary Pathologist and Chairman of the BSE sub-group of the EC Scientific Veterinary Committee.

Professor F. Brown FRS—Virologist and Chemist employed by United States Department of Agriculture. Formerly Deputy Director (Scientific) of the Animal Virus Research Institute (now known as the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Institute for Animal Health, Pirbright).

Professor J. Collinge—Professor of Molecular Neurogenetics, Neurogenetics Unit, incorporating the Prion Disease Group, at Imperial College School of Medicine; Honorary Consultant Neurologist at St. Mary's Hospital and the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, London.

Professor W. D. Hueston—Veterinary Epidemiologist and Professor of Veterinary Medicine at University of Maryland, USA.

Dr. R. H. Kimberlin—Independent Consultant on scrapie and related diseases.

Dr. M. Painter—Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, City of Manchester Infection and Control Surveillance Unit.

Mr. D. B. Pepper—Private Veterinary Surgeon (retired).

Professor P. G. Smith—Epidemiologist, Head of Department of Communicable and Tropical Disease Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Dr. W. A. Watson—Former Director of the Central Veterinary Laboratory.

Farming (New Entrants)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures his Department is taking to encourage young people to enter the farming profession with particular reference to hill farming. [20370]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to our hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *230*.

In addition, Regulations laid on 3 December 1997 will help new entrants to sheep and suckler cow farming to obtain quota from the national reserve.

Belgian Cattle (BSE)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if BSE has been detected in Belgian cattle destined for the United Kingdom pet food market. [20363]

Mr. Rooker: One case of BSE has been reported in Belgium. The carcase of the affected animal was rendered, and we understand that the resulting meat and bone was exported to the Netherlands and Poland. We have no reason to believe that any part of the affected animal was imported into the UK for use in pet food.

Over Thirty Months Scheme

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what compensation is available to the owner of a three-year-old heifer which is barren but cannot be sold into the food chain under the Over Thirty Months Scheme. [20369]

Mr. Rooker: The compensation available for animals entering the Over Thirty Months Scheme is determined by weight up to a maximum weight limit of 560 kg (liveweight). The maximum compensation available for steers and heifers at current exchange rates is £350.67.

Meat (Growth Hormones)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the testing procedure used to ensure that no meat containing artificially added growth hormone is imported into the United Kingdom. [20368]

Mr. Rooker: The import from third countries of meat and meat products derived from animals treated with hormonal growth promoters has been banned since 1988, as has the use of these substances within the European community. Member states are responsible for implementing and policing the Community ban in respect of their own national production. Veterinary experts from the Commission may make on-the-spot checks to ensure the relevant Directives are being uniformly applied in all Member States.

Any third country wishing to export fresh meat to the European Union must submit residue sample plans to the Commission. These describe the residue sampling programme to be undertaken in respect of their meat production and must provide guarantees which are at least equivalent to the requirements of the Community on EC producers in respect of the banned substances.

Any third country which permits the use of growth promoting hormones is required to guarantee that no animal and no meat coming from animals to which they have been administered will be exported to the Community. Imports must be certified accordingly and Commission inspectors verify compliance with all the

requirements when they carry out periodic checks on third country slaughterhouses authorised to produce meat for export to the Community.

Port Health Authorities (or local authorities in their absence) are responsible under Directive 90/675/EEC for checking 1 per cent. of all imported meat and meat products for residues of veterinary medicines and for banned substances.

Beef Heifers

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons there are no proposals in the CAP Agenda 2000 to pay premium on heifers bred for beef. [21199]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Commission's proposals for the reform of the CAP regime for beef build on existing measures for that sector. These have traditionally focused on male animals (through intervention and the Beef Special Premium) and on suckler cows. The Commission believes that, in providing additional support for suckler cows and with the introduction of a premium on dairy cows, it is proposing some support for heifer calves reared for beef.

Quarantine

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the procedures and criteria applied by his officials when dealing with the release of puppies and kittens born in quarantine; and if he will make a statement. [21166]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Puppies and kittens born to the quarantined mother are subject to 15 days' quarantine after separation from the mother providing she is still healthy at the time the puppies or kittens are released. The risk to puppies or kittens born to a quarantined mother is believed to be restricted to transmission of infected saliva after birth. Transmission of the rabies virus in utero is unknown, according to the scientific literature. As the rabies virus is present in the saliva for less than two weeks before clinical signs appear there is no risk to offspring if the mother is clinically healthy a fortnight after separation from the litter.

Agrimonetary Compensation Scheme

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to submit an application to the European Union on behalf of the United Kingdom for assistance under the agrimonetary compensation scheme. [21163]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* We are considering what further action might be necessary to alleviate the position of farmers affected by currency movements and other developments affecting income.

Offering new funds to farmers, even with reimbursement from the EU budget, carries very significant implications for UK public expenditure.

Beef on the Bone

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what organisations he has consulted in connection with the proposed ban on the sale of bone-in beef. [21197]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Department consulted over 330 organisations representing consumer, industry and farming interests. The names of the organisations concerned are included in the consultation package on the proposed legislation prohibiting the sale of bone-in beef, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria he will use to judge when the ban on the sale of beef on the bone products should be lifted in the United Kingdom. [20502]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Our priority remains consumer safety. The ban will be kept under review and any decision to lift it will be taken in the light of scientific developments and progress with the eradication of BSE.

Bovine Bones

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which enforcement agencies will have responsibility for bovine bones in *(a)* butchers' shops, *(b)* cutting plants and *(c)* abattoirs. [21097]

Mr. Rooker: Enforcement of the new controls on bovine bones in Great Britain will be carried out as part of normal supervision and inspection of food premises, by either the Meat Hygiene Service in licensed cutting premises and abattoirs or local authorities in all other food premises.

Live Cattle (Export)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will stop the payment of export refunds on the export of live cattle to third countries; and if he will make a statement. [20891]

Mr. Rooker: The United Kingdom does not pay export refunds on live cattle, because it is not currently allowed to export them. Any agreement to abolish export refunds on live cattle would have to be reached at Community level. Such agreement is unlikely. Nevertheless, thanks in large measure to UK pressure, the Agriculture Council has this week adopted a Commission proposal which will make the granting of refunds on live cattle subject to compliance with Community legislation on animal welfare and, in particular, the protection of animals during transport.

Rural Advisory Committee

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he appointed each of the non-farming members of the Rural Advisory Committee; and if he will make a statement. [20103]

Mr. Rooker: All members of the Agricultural Advisory Group were chosen for the personal expertise and experience they could bring to bear on the subjects the Group would be asked to consider.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies

11. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he is taking to broaden the social background from which appointments to non-departmental public bodies are made. [19611]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government are committed to attracting a broad range of applicants for public appointments—by the use of advertising and by encouraging members of under-represented groups to nominate themselves for the central and departmental lists of candidates.

12. **Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about his proposals to make quangos more open and accountable. [19613]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Following the publication of the Government's consultation paper "Opening up Quangos" we have received a number of comments from a wide range of organisations and from individuals. Most of these welcome the proposals in the consultation paper and offer additional suggestions to make quangos more open and accountable.

15. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress in reducing the number of quangos. [19618]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Ministers are taking a careful look to see which quangos are really necessary, with a view to keeping the numbers to a minimum. Ministers are also undertaking a zero-based analysis of the functions of the NDPBs they sponsor as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

25. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to make non-departmental bodies more accountable to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [19628]

Dr. David Clark: In our consultation paper "Opening up Quangos", published on 11 November, we set out ways of improving the accountability of quangos. I am inviting Select Committees to have greater oversight of quangos, by looking at annual reports and by being involved in the regular five-yearly reviews of quangos.

Freedom of Information

13. **Ms Julie Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the principal objectives of the Government's proposals on freedom of information. [19614]

Dr. David Clark: The objective of our proposals on freedom of information are to encourage more open and accountable government by establishing a general statutory right of access to official records and information.

21. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on his proposed freedom of information legislation. [19624]

Dr. David Clark: My right hon. Friend is a member of the Cabinet Committee which discussed extensively the proposals for freedom of information legislation now set out in our White Paper "Your Right to Know".

26. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement regarding the release of Government papers. [19629]

Dr. David Clark: The White Paper on Freedom of Information, "Your Right to Know", contains proposals for a Freedom of Information Act which would incorporate access rights to both current and historic records. For the present, Government records will continue to be released in accordance with the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to promote the Government's policy on freedom of information. [19615]

Dr. David Clark: I look forwared to a wide-ranging public debate on the proposals set out last week in the White Paper "Your Right to Know". As well as publishing the White Paper in print and on the internet, 40,000 copies of a leaflet explaining the main proposals are being distributed. The leaflet will also be available in seven minority languages, in large print, in Braille and on audio cassette.

Food Standards Agency

14. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to publish his proposals for a food safety standards agency; and if he will make a statement. [19617]

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he plans to publish his White Paper on food safety; and if he will make a statement. [19623]

Mr. David Clark: The Government will be announcing their proposals when Parliament returns in the new year.

16. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on his proposals for the establishment of a food safety standards agency. [19619]

22. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received recently concerning food safety; and if he will make a statement. [19625]

Dr. David Clark: I refer the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant).

Special Advisers

17. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will review the operation of the new model contract for special advisers. [19620]

Dr. David Clark: The new model contract for special advisers was promulgated by the Prime Minister on 19 May 1997. It is kept under review, and will be amended as and when a need is identified.

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the role of special advisers with responsibilities for Government information. [19627]

Dr. David Clark: As I have made clear in response to questions from hon. Members, this Government have set out clearly in the model contract for special advisers the terms and conditions under which special advisers are employed. We have also published the report of the Review of the Government Information Service which clarifies the role of those special advisers with responsibility for media-related matters. Copies of both documents are in the Library.

Public Information (Broadcasting)

18. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what instructions are issued to the Central Office of Information on the broadcasting of public information announcements on television. [19621]

Mr. Kilfoyle: There are no instructions issued to the Central Office of Information on the broadcasting of public information announcements on television.

Better Government Programme

19. **Mr. Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to involve local government in the better government programme. [19622]

Mr. David Clark: Local government are key partners in the Better Government programme.

As part of the Deputy Prime Minister's initiative to develop the partnership between Central and Local Government, I have set up a Working Group on Public Service Delivery, which includes representatives from the Local Government Association. The aim of the Group is to develop a framework for innovative pilots to improve services at the local level through different organisations working together.

Service Delivery (Technology)

23. **Mrs. Ann Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his plans to promote public services via electronic networks. [19626]

Dr. David Clark: The Government intend to publish next year a White Paper on "Better Government", which will set out the way in which access to government services will be transformed using modern technology.

On 9 December I formally launched direct.link, an electronic forum which aims to bring together public sector organisations and voluntary agencies which are actively engaged in projects to provide electronic services to the citizen.

Direct.link is managed by the Central IT Unit (CITU) and it will conduct most of its business electronically, using discussion groups and e-mail. Direct.link will enable members to exchange ideas, share experiences and investigate topics of common interest.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure that Government Departments resolve the millennium computer compliance problem. [19605]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made to the House on 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *1104–05*.

Citizens Charter

Ms Ward: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to reform the programme of charters. [19616]

Mr. Kilfoyle: We announced to the House on 2 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *284–87*, the Government's intention to relaunch the citizens charter. A consultation exercise to find out what people want from the programme ended on 21 November. We have received responses from a wide variety of sources, including consumer representative organisations; professional institutions; hospitals; local authorities; academics; and individual members of the public.

These responses will help shape the new programme, details of which will be published early next year as part of the Better Government initiative.

SOCIAL SECURITY

E-mail

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *441*, if he will list the e-mail addresses of *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* senior officials and *(c)* chief executives of agencies for which he is responsible. [15868]

Mr. Field *[holding answer 13 November 1997]:* Preparatory work is required to confirm that all security concerns have been addressed and that listed Ministers, Senior Officials and Agency Chief executives have systems/procedures in place to handle external E-Mail traffic.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *664*, for how many of the 433 lone parents referred to in Table 1 of her Department's publication "A New Deal for Lone Parents: Moving Forward-Progress Report on the First Three Months" reported as having obtained work she has information in the form set out in Table 2 of that report; and if she will publish such information as she has in that form. [18886]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Information on the age, number of children, wage, previous duration on benefit, type of work and area is available for 409 of the 864 lone parents who have moved into work under the New Deal for Lone Parents up to the end of November. This information has been placed in the Library.

The Government do not routinely collect data on in-work costs for lone parents moving into work under the New Deal. This information will instead be assessed during the separate research commissioned for the New Deal. The research data will be released when the research is complete.

The eight estimates of financial gain from moving into work provided in the report "Moving Forward" were provided to illustrate the effects on individuals before in-work costs. These data are not, though, sufficiently robust for analysis of the impact of the New Deal.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made, and on the basis of what sources of information, of the difference in incomes between lone parents on income support and those in work *(a)* before and *(b)* after child care costs are taken into account. [19703]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Estimates by the independent Policy Studies Institute indicate that the weekly income for lone parents already in work and receiving Family Credit is likely to be, on average, over £50 more than their estimated income on Income Support.

This estimate is based on a 1994 sample of lone parents in work, adjusted by the Policy Studies Institute to take account of two subsequent policy changes (the introduction of the childcare disregard in all in-work benefits in October 1994 and the introduction of a 30 hour credit in Family Credit in July 1995) and the annual uprating of benefit levels. It does not take account of changes announced in June 1997 to extend the child care disregard further.

The £50 per week estimate is before in-work costs which, excluding child care costs, averaged £5 per week; 79 per cent. were not paying for child care.

Some 21 per cent. of the sample were paying for child care. After allowing for in-work costs, including the costs of child care, this group is on average over £18 per week better off in work than on Income Support. These figures are, however, based on a small sample and should be treated with caution.

Direct comparisons between out of work income and in-work income for those lone parents currently receiving Income Support are difficult. It is not straightforward to predict the earnings of those lone parents who move into work since this would depend on the type of job they might get, and for how many hours. In addition, it is not possible to predict what child care costs they might have.

In order to ensure that more lone parents are better off financially in work, the Government will implement a National Minimum Wage and National Child Care Strategy, reforming the tax and benefit systems, and provide extra help with the cost of child care and access to lifetime learning.

It is important to recognise, though, that the financial return from working is not the only consideration which lone parents make in deciding to work. Qualitative research indicates that some lone parents choose to work in part to provide a role model for their children, and to take them away from dependency on benefit.

The New Deal for Lone Parents will provide practical help and advice for the lone parents on Income Support who want to move into work. As part of the New Deal service, lone parents who have been offered work, and have been advised of their earnings, can ask their Personal Adviser for an estimate of their likely entitlement to Family Credit and other in-work benefits. The evaluation of the programme includes a quantitative survey of a sample of participants in all eight areas of the scheme which will collect systematic information from lone parents on how much actually better off they are in work.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average income of a lone parent on (i) family credit and (ii) income support *(a)* in rented accommodation and *(b)* with a mortgage. [20548]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The information is set out in the table.

£ per week

	Before housing costs		*After housing costs*	
	Mean	*Median*	*Mean*	*Median*
Families on family credit in rented accommodation	197	198	155	155
Families on family credit with a mortgage	202	204	171	167
Families on income support in rented accommodation	184	166	135	116
Families on income support with a mortgage	177	166	127	112

Source:

Households Below Average Income (HBAI).

Notes:

1. Figures are for 1995–96.

2. The data come from the Department's Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series, based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and covering Great Britain. The FRS data were used to achieve a large enough sample size to provide more robust information. All results are subject to sampling error.

3. Both mean and median figures are given. This is because mean results may be affected by atypical households skewing the results.

4. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income. The definition of income used follows that in the published HBAI series for FRS based results and therefore takes no account of child care costs; figures are given both before and after housing costs in line with usual HBAI practice. Families are counted as "with a mortgage" if the household they live in has a mortgage.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Child Support Agency is permitted to make inquiries of the Inland Revenue in respect of the financial income in cases involving absent parents. [20079]

Mr. Field: The Child Support Agency can obtain the address of the absent parent and details of his employer from the Inland Revenue for tracing purposes. However, under current legislation, financial details cannot be obtained. We are determined to ensure that the Child Support Agency provides an efficient and effective service and are looking at all aspects of its work to see where improvements can be made. We aim to bring forward proposals in the first half of next year.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absent parents are currently paying the minimum amount of child maintenance, as stipulated by the CSA, whilst they are receiving statutory *(a)* sick pay and *(b)* incapacity benefit. [20120]

Mr. Field: Absent parents receiving Statutory Sick Pay or Incapacity Benefit who are assessed to pay the minimum amount or less are exempt from payment.

Data from August 1997 show a small number of these cases with an assessment for the minimum amount. These will be cases where the absent parent has only recently started to receive statutory sick pay or incapacity benefit but the assessment has not yet been revised, and cases where payment of those benefits has ceased but the records have not yet been fully updated.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the guidance given to the Benefits Agency in assessing the capacity for work for persons suffering from ME and similar diseases. [20140]

Mr. Field: Detailed guidance on the approach to assessing people with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (commonly referred to as ME) and similar conditions where variability of severity of symptoms is a feature, is provided in the Incapacity Benefit Handbook issued to all Benefits Agency Medical Services doctors. The doctors are trained to take an overall view of someone's capacity for work taking into account the degree to which their conditions vary and the effects of pain and fatigue.

We are looking at all aspects of provision for sick and disabled people as a part of our comprehensive spending review. During the review we shall take care to think about the particular needs of different groups and to assess whether the benefit system is addressing these in the right way.

Disabled People

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to improve incentives to work for disabled people. [21005]

Mr. Denham: The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age, and are committed to improving opportunities and incentives for disabled people who want to work. Under our New Deal for people with a disability or long-term illness, up to £195 million, set aside from the Windfall Tax, will be used to finance a range of options aimed at helping participants, in the most effective way possible, to move into or stay in work. One key element of the New Deal will involve funding a number of innovative schemes to test ways of helping people who want to work, and the bidding process for this part of the programme was launched on 9 December. In parallel with these initiatives we are also considering what changes might be made to the benefit system to improve incentives and reduce disincentives to work.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been awarded invalid care allowance in each of the last three years; [20672]

(2) how many people currently claim invalid care allowance. [20676]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Number of claims to invalid care allowance and awards made[1]

thousands

	Claims received	*Awards made*
1994	123	94
1995	152	104
1996	165	116

Notes:

1. The figures are derived from separate counts. The number of awards made in any year is not necessarily the result of claims received in that year. There will be some awards made on claims made in the preceding year, and some claims received that are not awarded until the following year.
2. As at 1 October 1997, there were 371,000 Invalid Care Allowances currently in payment.

Source:

Figures based on a 100 per cent. count of Invalid Care Allowance claims, awards and allowances in Great Britain.

Women Claimants

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of couples were in receipt of income support or income related jobseeker's allowance in which the woman is the claimant, for each year since 1990. [20678]

Mr. Field: The information is set out in the table:

Claimants of income support/income based jobseeker's allowance where the women heads the unit 1990–97

	All couples	*Couples headed by a woman*	
		Number	*As a percentage of all couples*
May 1990	691,000	35,000	5
May 1991	763,000	37,000	5
May 1992	891,000	48,000	5
May 1993	1,016,000	63,000	6
May 1994	992,000	75,000	8
May 1995	946,000	85,000	9
May 1996	915,000	91,000	10
February 1997	855,000	91,000	11

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Income based jobseeker's allowance replaced income support for the unemployed from October 1996.
3. Sample size 1 per cent. up to 1992, 5 per cent. thereafter.

Sources:

1. Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries, 1990–93.
2. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, May 1994–February 1997.
3. Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, February 1997.

Carer Benefits

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits are available to those who care for others. [20675]

Mr. Denham: Carers have access to the full range of Social Security benefits depending on their individual circumstances. Invalid Care Allowance is the benefit intended specifically for carers. Carers may also qualify for the carer premium within the income related benefits.

Family Credit

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female (i) earners and (ii) benefit recipients in couples in receipt of family credit at the latest date for which information is available. [20670]

Mr. Field: The information is set out in the table.

Couples receiving family credit, by gender of main or subsequent earner, May 1997

		Partner	
Gender of main earner	*Main earner*	*With earnings*	*Without earnings*
Male	308,000	20,000	288,000
Female	98,000	11,000	87,000
All cases	406,000	31,000	375,000

Source:

Family credit 5 per cent. sample of all awards.

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Figures are based on the gender of the main earner and their partner.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale were in receipt of family credit in each year since 1992. [19694]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of Family Credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 16 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale were in receipt of Family Credit (FC) during each year since 1992.

The information is not available in the format requested. FC is administered centrally by the Family Credit Unit. Statistics are produced on a national basis and provide the number of families in receipt of FC within a particular Benefits Agency (BA) local office area at a given date. This only serves as a "snap-shot" of the position at that date and does not indicate the number of families in receipt of FC annually.

Information on FC claims is normally destroyed after 18 months. However, the information requested is currently available from 1993 onwards and the figures for the two BA local offices within this area are as follows:

April	*Burnley*	*Rossendale*
1993	2,933	782
1994	3,393	864
1995	3,936	910
1996	4,171	800
1997	4,575	665

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the entitlement to benefits of those who agree to participate in Welfare to Work for long term sick and disabled schemes. [17724]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* The Government strongly believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age, and have set aside £195 million to fund a programme improving opportunities for sick and disabled people who want to work. We are currently consulting representatives from a number of disability organisations and employers on our initial proposals. These include funding a number of innovative schemes to explore how best to help people move into work or stay in work; introducing personal advisers to help sick and disabled people to overcome barriers to work; an information campaign to improve knowledge of the existing help available to help people into work and to change attitudes of benefit recipients, employers and the public; and a programme of research and evaluation to develop our understanding of the client group and to determine the effect of our initiatives. Participation in the welfare to work programme will be voluntary.

In addition we are examining the effect of benefit rules on incentives for sick and disabled people who want to work as part of our comprehensive spending review, and are considering the need for any changes. We are particularly keen that benefit rules should not discourage participation in the Welfare to Work programme.

We are committed to looking at ways of ending the exclusion of disabled people, and empowering them to play a full role in society. We want to develop an approach which focuses on people's abilities, instead of their disabilities.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action is being taken to reduce the waiting times for appeals heard by the Independent Tribunal Service. [20746]

Mr. Field: The operation of the appeals system is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service.

However, we are determined to reduce the current delays and complexity in the appeals system. The Social Security Bill, which paves the way for modernising the delivery of social security, including the handling of appeals, had its third reading in the House on

10 December and is now continuing its passage through the House of Lords. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will assume responsibility for the administration of the appeals system. She will set and publish demanding targets for the administration of appeals and report on the results.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if recipients of disability living allowance who receive a questionnaire under the Benefits Integrity Programme are entitled to see a copy of their initial claim form; and what publicity his Department provides in respect of these arrangements. [20822]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to rebuild integrity in, and public support for, the Social Security system and the way in which public money is spent. We need to focus on those who are properly entitled to benefit. This is why we have set up the Benefit Integrity Project.

The administration of this programme is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 16 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking whether recipients of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) who receive a questionnaire under the Benefits Integrity Programme are entitled to see a copy of their initial claim form; and what publicity his Department provides in respect of these arrangements.

The Benefit Integrity Project (BIP) was set up in response to the recent Benefit Review of DLA. Over the next two years, specially trained staff will make enquiries by postal questionnaire or home visit in over 400,000 cases to establish whether DLA is being paid correctly.

A copy of the original form will be sent to DLA recipients on request. We have had several useful meetings with organisations representing disabled people at which this provision was emphasised, as it was on the *Does He Take Sugar?* radio broadcast made by the Baroness Hollis of Heigham.

I hope that this is helpful.

Housing Benefit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of housing benefit claimants for the benefit areas covering (1) Regent's Park and (2) Kensington North; how many of the claimants are *(a)* local authority, *(b)* housing association and *(c)* private tenants; and if he will list the (i) highest, (ii) average, (iii) median and (iv) upper and lower quartile payment figures for *(a)* to *(c)*. [20975]

Mr. Field: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

The information relates to the London Boroughs of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.

Caseloads and weekly average amounts of housing benefit at the end of May 1997

	Local authority tenants	*Private tenants (excluding housing association tenants)*	*Housing association tenants*
Westminster			
Recipients	9,960	7,440	5,980
Average housing benefit	£59.09	£106.85	£61.62
Kensington and Chelsea			
Recipients	5,720	4,620	6,670
Average housing benefit	£64.86	£106.53	£58.56

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System.
Notes:
1. Recipients may be a single person or a couple.
2. Westminster's figures are estimated based on actuals for November 1996.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 December 1997

TREASURY

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the use of insurance premium tax as a marketing promotion by insurance retailers competing with travel agents. [20713]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* I have received a number of such representations.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the system for allowing United Kingdom transactions to be made in euros will also allow payments in other European currencies. [15917]

Mrs. Liddell: The banking sector has decided to put in place the necessary parallel infrastructure to handle euro transactions from 1 January 1999, for the financial markets, businesses and individuals. The infrastructure will not have the capability to allow transactions in other European foreign currencies.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the impact of the national minimum wage on job levels. [21046]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Ministerial colleagues have received a number of representations on this issue. The Government has asked the Low Pay Commission to take into account the wider effects on the economy in making its recommendations on the level and coverage of the minimum wage.

Pension Fund Contributions

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the current scales of tax relief available for pension fund contributions. [21343]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* We intend to maintain a framework for the tax treatment of pension arrangements that will encourage people to save for their retirement.

Savings

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's target for the savings ratio by private investors; and by what date. [21341]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* Although there is no explicit target for the saving ratio, the Government want to encourage long-term savings and investment. The pursuit of economic stability is central to this goal. Moreover, the introduction of the new Individual Savings Accounts in 1999 will spread the savings culture by bringing the benefits of existing tax-favoured provision to a much wider population of savers.

Correspondence

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the letters to hon. Members from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury have been signed by Ola Solaja on her behalf since 2 May. [21420]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received some 2,250 letters from hon. Members since 2 May. A breakdown of replies signed by my Private Secretaries on my behalf is not available. I approve the text of all letters to Members before they are sent.

Financial Services (Complaints and Compensation)

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for reform of complaints handling and compensation schemes for financial services. [22011]

Mrs. Liddell: The Financial Services Authority has today published consultation documents on proposed arrangements for complaints-handling and compensation. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

We intend that there should be a single independent Financial Services Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will deal with unresolved complaints against all firms authorised by the Financial Services Authority.

The legislative framework for the Financial Services Ombudsman and for a single financial services compensation scheme will be included in the draft legislation to reform the regulatory system that the Government plan to publish for consultation next summer.

Consultation (Code of Practice)

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Code of Practice on consultation, mentioned in paragraph 5.1 of his Pre-Budget Report, will be published. [21875]

Dawn Primarolo: I am pleased to report that the Code of Practice on consultation, which will apply to consultations on tax policy in connection with the Budget and Finance Bill by the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Treasury, has today been made available on each of the departments' Internet sites. Printed versions will be available on request and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many applications have been made to the national lottery distributing bodies to date from organisations in the Glasgow, Govan constituency; how

many organisations from the Govan constituency have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful in their applications; and if he will make a statement. [20750]

Mr. Banks: From the information available, organisations in the Glasgow, Govan constituency have made 164 formal applications to the Lottery distributing bodies of which 59 have been successful, 85 unsuccessful and 20 are awaiting a final decision. The table shows the breakdown of applications by distributing body. The 59 successful awards have a total value of £4,763.715.

Decisions on applications are a matter for the distributing bodies. Information on unsuccessful applications is not kept by the Department. Information on successful Lottery applicants can be found on the Department's website www.lottery,culture.gov.uk

Distributing body	*Total applications*	*Successful (i.e. award given)*	*Unsuccessful*	*Awaiting final decision*
Scottish Arts Council	33	21	10	2
Scottish Sports Council	4	3 (1 of which was subsequently not taken up by applicant)	0	1
Heritage Lottery Fund	7	5	1	1
National Lottery Charities Board	120	30	74	16
Millennium Commission	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—
Total	164	59	85	20

[1] It has not been possible for the Millennium Commission to provide the information on unsuccessful application, due to the way in which its records have been compiled. The Commission has awarded grant totalling £62,924,410 to four capital projects based in Glasgow. The Commission has also made a further award of £564,000 under the Millennium Awards to Individuals scheme.

Tourist Attractions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the top 20 tourist attractions in the United Kingdom. [20910]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The information requested is as follows:

Top 20 tourist attractions in the UK

Attractions	*Number*
1. Blackpool Pleasure Beach	7,500,000
2. British Museum, London	6,228,275
3. National Gallery, London	5,000,000
4. Palace Pier, Brighton	4,250,000
5. Alton Towers, Staffordshire	2,749,000
6. Madame Tussaud's, London	2,715,000
7. Tower of London	2,539,272
8. Westminster Abbey	2,500,000
9. Eastbourne Pier	2,300,000
10. York Minster	2,200,000
11. Tate Gallery, London	2,002,000
12. St. Paul's Cathedral	2,000,000
12. Pleasureland, Southport	2,000,000
14. Chessington World of Adventures	1,700,000
14. Canterbury Cathedral	1,700,000
16. Natural History Museum, London	1,607,255
17. Science Museum, London	1,548,286
18. Legoland, Windsor	1,420,511
19. Pleasure Beach, Great Yarmouth	1,400,000
20. Frontierland, Morecambe	1,300,000
20. Victoria and Albert Museum, London	1,300,000

Note:

Inevitably some of the above figures are estimates.

The above table does not include sporting, artistic and exhibition venues.

Source:

Sightseeing in the UK 1996 published by the English Tourist Board, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Scottish Tourist Board and Wales Tourist Board.

British Museum

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance he has made available to the British Museum in 1997–98 and 1998–99 to enable it to avoid introducing admission charges in terms of *(a)* grant and *(b)* tax treatment; and if such arrangements are to be extended to other museums. [21114]

Mr. Chris Smith: I am holding in reserve within my Department's budget for 1998–99 £1 million for the British Museum. The purpose of this provision is to help the Trustees of the British Museum to avoid irrevocable decisions on the introduction of admission charges pending the outcome of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. Before this reserve can be accessed the British Museum will have to demonstrate their need for special provision, having looked at other sources of income. Payment of any advance grant would be subject to the following conditions:

(i) that the Museum prepares an action plan, subject to approval by my Department, for generating more income to supplement its grant-in-aid; for achieving significant efficiency savings; and for improvements to the management of the Museum's finances;

(ii) that the Museum succeeds in eliminating the balance of its projected deficit for the financial year 1998–99; and

(iii) that the Trustees of the British Museum maintain free entry throughout 1998.

I am also holding in reserve £300,000 for 1998–99 for the Tate Gallery to help them to maintain free entry pending the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Before this reserve can be accessed the Tate Gallery will have to demonstrate the need for this extra grant, having explored other sources of income.

No special tax measures or tax treatment are being offered to either the British Museum or the Tate Gallery.

In addition, I was able to announce to the House on 8 December the establishment by the Heritage Lottery Fund of an Access Fund, initially of £5 million per year, to enable all museums and galleries to bid for resources to help improve access to their collections in a variety of different ways.

Sportsmark Scheme

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to extend the Sportsmark scheme to primary schools. [21018]

Mr. Chris Smith: We have no plans to extend the Sportsmark scheme to primary schools. However, the English Sports Council are currently working on plans to introduce an Activity award for primary schools.

Tourism

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the scope and purpose of his Department's plan for tourism; and when it will be published. [21017]

Mr. Chris Smith: I aim to publish a comprehensive and detailed tourism strategy next summer, spelling out how the Government intend to create and sustain an improved framework within which tourism, hospitality and leisure can flourish.

Lottery White Paper

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many responses he has received to the White Paper, "The People's Lottery"; and if he will make a statement. [22125]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have received responses from nearly 500 organisations and over 90 individuals. The vast majority of these welcomed the Government's proposals for reforming the National Lottery. I have today placed a report summarising the main themes emerging from these responses in the Libraries of both Houses.

The White Paper announced the creation of a new Lottery good cause for health, education and the environment and of the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts. The National Lottery Bill, which was published on 4 December, gives effect to these proposals. The White Paper also committed £1 billion from the Lottery to the new good cause and NESTA by 2001. These funds will be split as follows:

- £300 million for training teachers and librarians in the use of new technology, including £50 million for digitising educational and learning materials held in schools and libraries;
- £300 million for out of school hours activities, with a further £100 million after 2001. £200 million will help local communities set up out of school childcare clubs across the UK, to meet the needs of working parents. £180 million will provide out of school hours learning activities in half of all secondary schools and a quarter of all primary schools. A further £20 million will fund integrated schemes offering childcare and learning;
- £200 million for healthy living centres, with a further £100 million after 2001, to establish a network designed to serve around 20 per cent. of the population; and
- £200 million as an endowment for NESTA, sufficient to provide an income which will move NESTA into the top ten grant giving endowment funds in the UK.

Public Expenditure

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what decisions he has taken on public expenditure allocations for 1998–99. [22126]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department's spending plans for next year are listed in the table. I am today writing to the Chairmen of funded bodies informing them of the grant they can expect next year.

I have generally chosen to maintain settlements at the level planned last year. Some adjustments have however had to be made to reflect the costs to the UK of increases in related European Community budget programmes and to reflect transfers of responsibility to and from my Department. My objective throughout has been to ensure that the bodies I fund can continue to deliver their existing services within the total provision for expenditure that was announced last year.

These allocations do not necessarily reflect my longer term priorities. These will be set in the Departmental Spending Review and will provide the foundation for a different approach to resource allocation in the future. I look forward to working with our funded bodies to make this a reality.

Culture, Media and Sport: 1998–99 allocations

	£000
Museums and Galleries	207,599
British Museum	32,921
Natural History Museum	26,960
Imperial War Museum	10,573
National Gallery	17,889
National Maritime Museum	10,184
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	12,696
National Portrait Gallery	4,697
National Museum of Science and Industry	20,281
Tate Gallery	18,218
Victoria and Albert Museum	29,127
Wallace Collection	1,816
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	2,178
Museum of London	4,210
Sir John Soane's Museum	567
Horniman Museum	3,144
Geffrye Museum	1,047
Museums and Galleries Commission	8,941
Government Indemnity Scheme	150
Assets accepted in lieu of tax	2,000
Libraries	89,720
British Library grant in aid	80,450
British Library St. Pancras Project	349
Wolfson Public Libraries Improvement Scheme	2,000
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts	1,039
Public Lending Right	4,903
Public Library Development Incentive Scheme	225
Library and Information Commission	430
Royal National Institute for the Blind	200
National Manuscripts Conservation Trust	70
Royal Geographic Society	54
Arts	193,365
Arts Council of England	184,600
Crafts Council	3,200
National Heritage Arts Sponsorship Scheme	5,050
Government Art Collection	351
Other arts programmes	164
Sports	49,434
English Sports Council	33,289
United Kingdom Sports Council	11,600
Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme	3,200
Children's play	400
Football Licensing Authority	896
British Chess Federation	49
Historic Buildings, Monuments and Sites	141,817
Occupied Royal Palaces and other Historic Buildings	18,714
English Heritage	102,150
National Heritage Memorial Fund	2,000

Culture, Media and Sport: 1998–99 allocations

	£000
Royal Commission for Historical Monuments in England	10,710
Royal Armouries	3,723
Churches Conservation Trust	2,479
Royal Fine Art Commission	705
Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust	300
Other heritage institutions and support	1,036
Historic Royal Palaces	4,020
Royal Parks Agency	20,950
Tourism	44,749
British Tourist Authority	35,000
English Tourist Board	9,732
Other support	17
Broadcasting and Media	98,670
Welsh Fourth Channel Authority (S4C)	75,127
British Film Institute	15,100
National Film and Television School	2,100
British Screen Finance Ltd.	2,000
European Film Co-production	2,000
British Film Commission	850
Eureka and Audiovisual Observatory	393
Broadcasting Standards Commission	1,971
Other	–871
Administration (including OFLOT), Research and Contingencies	25,383
ERDF	36,000
Culture, Media and Sport Total	911,707

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Appointments Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what factors underlay his decision not to proceed with the establishment of a judicial appointments commission. [20377]

Mr. Hoon: In the light of the other substantial priorities facing the Department, including the very heavy workload connected with legal aid and civil justice reforms, my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has decided not to proceed with further work on a possible Commission but to concentrate on making those changes he regards as most urgent in the existing system. He has decided to act directly to improve the openness, flexibility and effectiveness of the judicial appointments process. New measures include the presentation of an annual report to Parliament on the operation of the judicial appointments system (the first report will cover the period 1998–99).

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates serve on the active list of *(a)* the Harwich and *(b)* the Tendring petty sessional divisions. [20586]

Mr. Hoon: 16 magistrates serve on the active list of the Harwich Petty Sessional Division and 30 magistrates serve on the Tendring Petty Sessional Division.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates serve on the active list of the Colchester Petty Sessional Division; how many live within the Division; and how many live in the Colchester constituency. [20588]

Mr. Hoon: There are 84 magistrates on the active list of the Colchester Petty Sessional Division. 78 live within the Division; 34 live within the area of the Colchester constituency and a further 25 live within the area of the adjacent constituency of North Essex.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations his Department has had on the amalgamation of the Colchester, Harwich and Tendring magistrates benches; and if he will make a statement. [20587]

Mr. Hoon: My Department has not undertaken, or taken part in, any consultations on the proposed amalgamation.

Section 33 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 provides that a magistrates' courts committee may submit to the Lord Chancellor a draft order proposing changes to the petty sessional divisions, or PSDs, in its area. Section 34 of the Act requires a magistrates' courts committee to consult all the magistrates of the affected benches and relevant paying authority, before the Lord Chancellor may consider any application for change under section 33.

I can confirm that an application to reorganise a number of PSDs in Essex, including Colchester, Harwich and Tendring, was received from Essex MCC on 17 November 1997.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are his Department's proposals in respect of the Equal Opportunities Commission's grant-in-aid budget for 1998. [20998]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Grant-in-Aid for the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1998–99 will be set out in the DfEE Departmental Report, to be published in the new year.

New Deal

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the advantages of extending the New Deal programme to those economically inactive individuals who are not officially registered as unemployed. [21317]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Both the New Deal for Lone Parents and the New Deal for Disabled People offer support to people who have been economically inactive. We will evaluate the impact of our welfare to work programmes and keep their coverage under review.

International Labour Conference

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for publishing the White Paper on the instruments adopted at the 83rd Session of the International Labour Conference and the instrument for the amendment of the ILO Constitution adopted at the 85th Session of the International Labour Conference. [22018]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have today published a White Paper entitled "International Labour Conference", copies of which have been placed in Library.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if his Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem include costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21562]

Dr. Howells: Yes. Departmental costings relating to the embedded chip issue were itemised in the reply on 4 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *163*, given to the hon. Member on our estimates of the total cost of addressing the millennium compliance problem.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what millennium compliance problems have occurred to date in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* other public bodies; and if he will make a statement. [21561]

Dr. Howells: The Department has anticipated the potential for problems where its systems hold data that include dates beyond Year 2000 and/or where such systems manipulate these dates. All such systems have been identified and timely corrective action is being taken. No other specific problems have been identified either within the Department, its agency or the Non Departmental Public Bodies responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Unemployment Forecasts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish his Department's internal forecasts of the level of UK unemployment over the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [21355]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The DfEE does not forecast unemployment. The current planning assumption, set out in "Securing Britain's long-term economic future" *Pre-Budget Report* November 1997, is for unemployment to remain flat at its October 1997 level.

Beef (Schools)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice he has issued to local education authorities about the inclusion of beef on the school menu. [21605]

Ms Estelle Morris: In March 1996, the Department issued to all schools and local education authorities in England a statement made by the then Secretary of State for Health, together with a statement by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), about the implications of the evidence on BSE for children and for school meal provision.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistics his Department collates as to which countries supply beef to British schools. [21602]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department does not collect this information.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of schools which have removed beef from the menu. [21604]

Ms Estelle Morris: The content of school meals is a matter for individual local education authorities and grant-maintained schools, and the Department has not collected information on or made estimates of the number of schools not serving beef.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Women's Prisons (Overcrowding)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the level of overcrowding in women's prisons. [19285]

Ms Quin: There are two measures of overcrowding: prisoners held two to a cell designed for one and prisoners held above the designated uncrowned capacity.

158 female prisoners were held two to a cell designed for one at four prisons at the end of October 1997: 60 at Cookham Wood; 56 at Low Newton; 10 at Risley; and 32 at Winchester.

The Prison Service also uses the concept of Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) to define the uncrowded capacity of an establishment. Expressing the actual population as a percentage of the CNA can be used as a measure of occupancy. This measure takes into account all types of accommodation including single and double cells, rooms and dormitories.

The table shows the CNA of female establishments and the population on 28 November 1997.

Prison	*CNA*	*Prisoners*	*Percentage*
Askham Grange	130	130	100
Brockhill	159	116	73
Bullwood Hall	126	138	110
Cookham Wood	120	150	125
Drake Hall	281	275	98
Durham (Female Unit)	47	45	96
East Sutton Park	94	99	105
Eastwood Park	135	122	90
Foston Hall	150	132	88
High Point (Female Unit)	207	201	97
Holloway	517	517	100
Low Newton (Female Unit)	49	71	145
New Hall	327	362	90
Risley (Female Unit)	155	158	101
Styal	284	285	100
Winchester (Female Unit)	82	80	97
Total	2,863	2,881	101

Young Offenders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15 to 17 year old offenders received a sentence of *(a)* 15 months and *(b)* 21 months detention in a young offender institution in the most recent year for which figures are available. [20295]

Mr. Michael: In 1996, a total of 1,760 offenders aged 15, 16 or 17 were sentenced to detention in a young offender institution. Of these, 131 (7 per cent.) received a sentence of 15 months and 103 (6 per cent.) received a sentence of 21 months.

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications have been made for a licence to research and trial the medical use of cannabis or cannabis derivatives; and on what date each licence was granted; [20629]

(2) if he will list the individuals and organisations which have current licences from his Department permitting the research and trial of cannabis or cannabis derivatives for medical use. [20628]

Mr. George Howarth: According to existing records, a total of twenty two applications have been made for cannabis related research. All were granted and nineteen are currently valid. Of these, six are directly concerned with medical research. The licensee and date of grant of those six are as follows:

Dr. G. M. Stern, Middlesex Hospital—11 August 1988

Dr. P. Taylor, Bethlehem Hospital—27 February 1989

Dr. A. Holdcroft, Hammersmith Hospital—1 December 1994

Dr. R. Pertwee, University of Aberdeen—7 April 1974

Professor A. Smith, University of Oxford—1 August 1993

Mr. D. Todd, James Paget Hospital—1 May 1995.

The first three of these licences have now lapsed; the others remain in force.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *645*, for what reasons immigration detainees are held in prison establishments other than Haslar and Rochester; what arrangements are made to separate immigration detainees from convicted prisoners; what extra *(a)* facilities and *(b)* provision is made for immigration detainees above that for convicted prisoners; and what language interpretation is provided for immigration detainees who have limited command of the English language. [20957]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Under an agreement with the Prison Service, a number of places are made available for immigration detainees in Prison Service establishments other than Haslar and Rochester.

Detainees are normally held either together in a separate block of living accommodation or with unconvicted prisoners. They are treated in the same way as unconvicted prisoners for purposes of prison management, and as such have the special rights and privileges under Prison rules and instructions which flow from unconvicted status.

Translation services are available under a contract administered by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; every establishment has access to Language Line, a 24-hour telephone interpreting service, which is subsidised centrally; a list of accredited interpreters is available from the National Register of Public Service Interpreters, which is administered by the Institute of Linguists; establishments have been advised to maintain a list of members of staff and prisoners who can speak foreign languages and of any community services available locally. A number of foreign language documents, issued centrally by the Prison Service, are made available to non-English speaking prisoners and detainees explaining prison rules and procedures.

Deportation Orders

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* deportation orders have been signed by Ministers and *(b)* removals have taken place since 1 May. [20887]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of deportation orders signed by Ministers between 1 May 1997 and 30 September 1997 was 468. Information on removals during the same period is given in table 1.

Table 1: Persons removed from the United Kingdom, 1 May 1997 to 30 September 1997

	Number of persons removed[1]
Removal as a result of deportation action[2, 3]	648
Removal as a result of illegal entry action[2, 4]	2,015
Removal under port procedures[2]	10,574
Total removals	13,237

[1] These figures are provisional.
[2] Action may have been initiated in an earlier period.
[3] Includes persons who departed voluntarily after deportation action had been initiated.
[4] Includes persons who departed voluntarily after illegal entry action had been initiated.

Young People in Care

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people in each of the last three years have been remanded in the care of the local authority by courts. [20691]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

During the year ending 31 March 1996, the latest for which figures are available, 1,600 young people were remanded, or committed for trial or sentence, into the care of local authorities in England. The equivalent figures for the years ending 31 March 1995 and 1994 were 1,530 and 1,440 respectively.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many young people presently remanded in the care of the local authority are *(a)* excluded from school and *(b)* not excluded from school; [20690]

(2) what is the average number of hours per week of education undertaken by young people who are remanded in the care of the local authority who are *(a)* excluded from school and *(b)* not excluded from school. [20688]

Mr. Michael: Information on the education of those remanded in the care of the local authority is not collected centrally but I have obtained some related information from the Department for Education and Employment and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Surveys indicate that children in local authority care are more likely to be excluded from school than other groups, but there is no information on how many exclusions involve those remanded into care.

Most young people remanded will go into residential care with on-site schools and will not be excluded from school. Children not excluded from school will be subject to a standard school week (24 hours for those aged 14 to 16, Key stage 4).

Where a child is permanently excluded from school the Local Education Authority (LEA) is under a duty to provide suitable education. LEAS generally meet this duty through education in a pupil referral unit, which may be full or part-time, or by arranging home tuition for an average of around five hours a week.

A 1995 report "The Education of Children who are looked after by the Local Authority" produced jointly by the Department of Health Social Services Inspectorate and OFSTED examined the school attendance records of a broad group of 1,205 children, looked after in local authority foster and residential care. Information from that report appears in the following table.

School attendance at each Key Stage

Per cent.

	Key Stage 1 (4–7 years)	*Key Stage 2 (7–11 years)*	*Key Stage 3 (11–14 years)*	*Key Stage 4 (14–16 years)*	*Total*
Permanently excluded[1]	—	0.6	2.1	3.9	1.9
Fixed term exclusion[1,2]	—	0.3	3.0	2.8	1.7
attendance	2.1	1.6	7.3	18.9	8.4
problem indicated	87.1	92.5	82.4	66.9	81.2
information given	10.8	5.0	5.2	7.5	6.7
Total numbers	194	322	329	360	1,205

[1] Numbers relate to children excluded at the time of the census. Information was not collected about previous experience of exclusion.
[2] When this study was undertaken, fixed term exclusion applied for a maximum of 15 days in any one term. Since legislative changes introduced in 1997 fixed term exclusion can now extend to 45 days in any one year.

Horse Racing

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of British-based stallions commanding a fee of £10,000 or more. [21180]

Mr. George Howarth: The estimated number of British-based stallions commanding a fee of £10,000 or more is 19.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will estimate the ratio of overall income to overall costs of race horse owners in the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan; [21187]

(2) if he will publish the percentage of keep and training fees recoverable through prize money in the principle horse racing countries. [21190]

Mr. George Howarth: The percentage of keep and training fees recoverable through prize money in the principal horse racing nations is estimated as follows:

	Per cent.
Hong Kong	149
Japan	83
South Africa	64
Canada	59
Italy	57
France	49
United States of America	47
Germany	41
Australia	38
New Zealand	34
Britain	24
Ireland	19

Source:
International Federation of Horseracing Authorities, October 1997.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the overall costs and overall income of racing horse owners in the Untied Kingdom. [21186]

Mr. George Howarth: The British Horseracing Board estimate the overall costs and overall income of racing horse owners in the United Kingdom as follows:

(a) overall costs = £202 million (including entry fees)

(b) overall income = £49 million (total prize money less owners' entry fees and before any deductions to trainers, jockeys etc).

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the costs and returns to the owner of the a horse winning three Class E races. [21181]

Mr. George Howarth: The British Horseracing Board estimate the costs and returns to the owner of a horse winning three Class E races as:

(a) Costs = £15,200

(b) Returns = £12,600.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the effects of replacing betting duty on turnover with charging duty on gross profits. [21184]

Mr. George Howarth: This matter is properly for my Treasury colleagues. However, they tell me that general betting duty on stakes yielded £453 million in 1996–97; the yield of a duty on gross profit would depend on the rate charged and gross profit levels.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate Britain's place in the world rankings of returns to race horse owners. [21191]

Mr. George Howarth: Britain's place in the world rankings of percentage returns to racehorse owners is 36th of 41.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the Al Maktoum family to discuss the future of racing and the bloodstock industry. [21307]

Mr. George Howarth: We understand that there are plans for the British Horseracing Board to meet Sheikh Mohammed in the near future.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the economic effects of *(a)* doubling the returns and *(b)* halving the losses of race horse owners. [21188]

Mr. George Howarth: The British Horseracing Board estimate the economic effects of doubling the returns of racehorse owners to be:

New owners: 1,945

New horses: 2,867

Income: £132.3 million

Employment opportunities: 7,050.

No research has been carried out on the effect of halving the losses of racehorse owners.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of jobs in *(a)* motor racing and *(b)* the racing and bloodstock industries, excluding betting. [21179]

Mr. George Howarth: It is estimated that there are some 50,000 jobs in the United Kingdom motorsports industry, including support services, and 59,300 jobs (31,600 direct and 27,700 indirect) in the racing and bloodstock industries, excluding betting.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the percentages and amounts of betting duty levy put to prize money during each of the past 20 years. [21183]

Mr. George Howarth: The following table provided by the Horserace Betting Levy Board, sets out the annual contributions to prize money from the statutory levy on off-course betting.

General Betting Duty, currently 6.7 per cent. on off-course stakes, is paid to the Exchequer.

Year	*Levy yield (Bookmakers) £ million*	*Prize money £ million*	*Yield Percentage*
1977–78	9.4	6.0	63.8
1978–79	12.3	7.7	62.6
1979–80	14.7	9.2	62.6
1980–81	16.4	9.7	59.1
1981–82	17.0	9.5	55.9
1982–83	19.1	10.1	52.9
1983–84	18.4	10.0	54.3
1984–85	20.0	10.2	51.0
1985–86	21.1	9.8	46.4
1986–87	24.7	11.1	44.9
1987–88	27.9	11.6	41.6
1988–89	33.7	13.8	40.9
1989–90	35.4	18.6	52.5
1990–91	37.5	21.9	58.4
1991–92	36.0	22.1	61.4
1992–93	46.9	20.6	43.9
1993–94	50.9	25.5	50.1
1994–95	50.7	27.9	55.0
1995–96	48.0	30.9	64.4
1996–97	54.0	30.1	55.7

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the increase in prize money required to *(a)* double the returns and *(b)* halve the losses of race horse owners. [21189]

Mr. George Howarth: The British Horseracing Board estimate the increase in prize money required to:

(a) double the returns to racehorse owners would be £60 million;

(b) halve the losses of racehorse owners would be £97 million.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the returns to race horse owners in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Poland, *(c)* Mauritius and *(d)* Greece. [21192]

Mr. George Howarth: The estimated returns to race horse owners are as follows:

(a) Britain = 24 per cent.

(b) Poland = 73 per cent.

(c) Mauritius = 80 per cent.

(d) Greece = 109 per cent.

Source: International Federation of Horseracing Authorities, October 1997.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of horses in training for racing. [21182]

Mr. George Howarth: The number of horses in training for racing is estimated at 12,279 (average figure for 1996).

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review gambling legislation and taxation. [21185]

Mr. George Howarth: We have no immediate plans to review the gambling legislation.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reviews gaming and betting duties each year in the run up to the Budget.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the potential public order consequences of the year 2000 problem. [20973]

Mr. Michael: It is for individual chief police officers to ensure that their computer controlled systems are Year 2000 compliant. They are currently assessing the scale of the problem and taking action where appropriate, with help from the Police Information Technology Organisation. Police forces are also pursuing Year 2000 compliance with other bodies responsible for systems whose failure might have policing implications. Failure to comply could seriously affect police forces' functioning and could lead to additional calls on their services in a range of areas.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what millennium compliance have occurred to date in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* other public bodies; and if he will make a statement. [21563]

Mr. Straw: A small number of millennium compliance problems have occurred in my Department affecting management information, statistical and payroll data. These problems have been quickly resolved. No problems have occurred in either agencies or other public bodies.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem include costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21564]

Mr. Straw: My Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem do include costs relating to the embedded chip problem.

Racial Violence

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* Thames Valley Police and *(b)* others about the attack on a Sikh boy in Slough on 24 November; what steps he is taking to combat racist attacks; and if he will make a statement. [21193]

Mr. Michael: I was extremely concerned to hear about this incident and I hope that the child and his family are recovering from what must have been an extremely frightening and distressing experience. I understand that an investigation by Thames Valley Police is under way and the family can be assured that the police are treating this matter very seriously.

I have so far received three letters from the Sikh community in the Slough area concerning this attack.

The Government condemn all acts of racial violence and harassment. This is why we announced in the Crime and Disorder Bill new measures to tackle racially motivated crime. The offences will correspond to the existing main offences which deal with violence against the person and offences of harassment. The Government believe that the introduction of specific racial offences will send out a strong message that racial violence and harassment are unacceptable, and will act as a forceful deterrent. Specific offences will also encourage the victims of crimes to report them to the police, and ensure that a higher priority is given to the identification of the racial element, both in the gathering of evidence and in the prosecution of the case.

The Racial Incidents Standing Committee (RISC) has been created to take forward work between various agencies concerned with racial incidents. The group comprises the Home Office and other Government Departments, agencies from the criminal justice system, the Commission for Racial Equality and the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. RISC will tackle issues such as the effectiveness of multi-agency panels in dealing with racial incidents; the implications of the new offences in the Crime and Disorder Bill; and how racial incidents are policed.

On 31 July, my right hon. Friend also announced an inquiry into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence in order to identify the lessons to be learnt for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Certificate of Designation for Huntingdon Life Sciences was amended on 23 May to allow the breeding and supply to other licensed establishments. [21253]

Mr. George Howarth: I confirmed in my reply to the hon. Member on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *439*, that the Certificate of Designation was amended on 23 May to allow the breeding of dogs.

Under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, subsection 10(3)(a), dogs used in scientific procedures must normally be obtained from designated breeding establishments. There are no restrictions under the Act which prevent a designated breeding establishment from providing dogs to other establishments.

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the temporary accommodation in which breeding beagles are housed at Huntingdon Life Sciences at Occold meets the recommendations of the code of practice for the housing and care of animals in designated breeding and supplying establishments when the licence was granted; [21037]

(2) for what reasons the Certificate of Designation for Huntingdon Life Sciences was amended to allow the breeding of dogs before planning approval to build kennels had been granted. [21036]

Mr. George Howarth: The company first discussed the idea of breeding dogs with the Home Office in late 1996. The proposed accommodation had not been built, equipped or staffed specifically for the breeding of laboratory dogs. In some minor ways it did not, at that stage, meet all the requirements of the code of practice for the housing and care of animals in designated breeding and supplying establishments. The Inspectorate asked that some changes be made to the facilities in which the dogs were to be housed to meet the requirements of the code of practice. These changes were completed before the formal application for an amendment to the Certificate of Designation to allow breeding was submitted.

The Certificate holder submitted the formal application in May. By this time, the conditions met the requirements of the code of practice. The inspector for this establishment and another inspector with a specialist interest in breeding establishments had thoroughly

inspected the accommodation and assessed the proposed staffing arrangements. There was no legitimate reasons to refuse the application.

Should it receive planning permission, the new dog breeding facility planned by the company will exceed the minimum requirements of the code of practice and will also allow the company to expand its breeding colony. This is currently being limited by the Home Office to a size which is appropriate for the current accommodation and facilities.

Perverting the Course of Justice

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been convicted for perverting the course of justice and given a custodial sentence in each year since 1987; and what was the average length of sentence. [21104]

Mr. Michael: The information is given in the table.

Number of offenders convicted of offences of perverting the course of justice[1] by result, 1987 to 1996

England and Wales

Year	Total convictions	Total given a custodial sentence	Average sentence length (months)
1987	337	164	10.2
1988	494	236	10.3
1989	555	221	10.0
1990	678	256	8.0
1991	704	280	7.8
1992	816	306	9.1
1993	842	372	8.0
1994	1,132	511	7.7
1995	1,464	744	6.5
1996	1,775	835	7.0

[1] The common law offence of perverting, or attempting to pervert the course of justice and, as from 1995, Section 51(1)—"Intimidating a juror or witness or person assisting in investigation of offence", and Section 51(2)—"Harming or threatening to harm a witness, juror or person assisting in investigation" of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Video Recordings

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make changes to the authority responsible for making arrangements for the classification of video works under the Video Recordings Act 1984. [21667]

Mr. Straw: I have today laid before both Houses details of my proposal to designate Mr. Andreas Whittam Smith under section 4(4) of the Video Recordings Act 1984. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) earlier today announced that Mr. Whittam Smith will be appointed as their President from 1 January 1998, and I propose to designate him, in that capacity, to replace the Earl of Harewood and Lord Birkett of Ulverston. The designation itself will come into force in accordance with the procedures laid down in section 5 of the Act. This requires that the particulars of the proposal should lie before both Houses of Parliament for 40 days before the designation can be made, provided that neither House resolves during that period that the designation should not be made.

I have placed in the Library a copy of my designation proposal and the text of a letter I intend to send at the time of designation to Mr. Whittam Smith.

Mr. Whittam Smith has impressed me with his understanding of the issues relating to the responsibility of a designated authority and I expect him to provide strong leadership for the BBFC into the next millennium.

Immigration Policy

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the review of immigration policy on carer cases will be completed. [21533]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This review is nearing completion.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made for the vacant CRE Commission posts; and how many persons were shortlisted. [21871]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A total of 1,029 applications were received for six posts. Twenty-one candidates were shortlisted for interview. I expect to make a decision on appointments shortly.

Boundary Commission

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Boundary Commission has to conduct an interim review of parliamentary constituencies in England. [22015]

Mr. Straw: The Commission has informed me that it intends to consider making a report on parliamentary constituencies in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Surrey, in Greater London and Surrey, and also in Greater London. The Commission intends to commence forthwith an interim review of parliamentary constituencies in each of those areas.

PRIME MINISTER

Hospitality Costs

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the official functions he has hosted at 10 Downing Street since taking office indicating the number of guests who attended each event, the cost of each event and the total expenditure on such events over the period; and how many *(a)* functions and *(b)* guests attending each there were in the previous year and at what cost. [18178]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* I have hosted 26 official functions, details of which are as follows:

Date	Number of persons
7 May	25
13 May	120
8 June	5
11 June	3
12 June	5
14 June	25
26 June	4
15 July	13

Date	Number of persons
17 July	7
22 July	104
24 July	3
30 July	186
2 September	4
4 September	50
17 September	4
18 September	2
24 September	24
7 October	10
15 October	200
20 October	210
21 October	5
4 November	12
13 November	2
10 December	210
11 December	14
15 December	18

The figures include General Receptions, working lunches and dinners as well as other functions.

Total costs are not available in the form requested; nor are details of functions and numbers of guests in the year leading up to 2 May. However, for expenditure on official hospitality within my Department I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 5 December 1997, *Official Report,* columns *376–77.*

Duty Free Shopping

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Government has during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Union to secure the survey promised by the Commission of the potential number of job losses that will arise from the ending of the trade in duty free goods. [21165]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Government have no plans to use the UK presidency to press for a Commission survey. However, the UK will not stand in the way of any proposal for a Commission study particularly if this were to also examine the nature of any successor regime to duty free.

Structural Funds

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on what was agreed at the Luxembourg European Council on the application of the Structural Funds to sparsely populated areas. [21801]

The Prime Minister: Although an earlier draft of the Council Conclusions contained a reference to sparsely populated areas, the text finally agreed did not. Several Member States argued for a less extensive passage on the Structural and Cohesion Funds on the grounds that decisions are not needed before the Commission produce detailed proposals. I regret any confusion about this resulting from my answer to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), on 15 December 1997, *Official Report,* column 29.

Government Receptions

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria determine who is included on guest lists for Government receptions at 10 Downing Street. [21339]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* If the Reception has a particular theme, such as health, then the draft guest list is submitted by the Government Department concerned. For a "General" Reception, suggestions for draft guest lists are submitted from Government Departments, Ministers and members of the public.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Helms-Burton Legislation

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government intends to take to persuade the United States of America to repeal the Helms-Burton legislation. [21316]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We, along with our EU partners, take every opportunity to make it clear to the United States of America our opposition to the Helms-Burton Act.

Turkey

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the earliest date on which Turkey may be admitted as a full member of the EU; and if he will make a statement. [21312]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Turkey's application to join the EU will be judged on its merits and according to objective criteria, as will those of all other applicants. Turkey's progress towards EU membership will depend on the pace of political and economic reform in Turkey, and on Turkey's commitment to the EU's objectives and values.

Immigration

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of Mr. Mohammid Fazal who has applied for a visa to become a teacher at the Jarim Islamia Rizwia Mosque, Bradford; and what factors underlie the delays in processing his application. [21500]

Mr. Fatchett: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons, sent a letter to my hon. Friend about this case on 17 December.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision will be made on the application for entry clearance by Arshad Khan at Islamabad High Commission, ref. D8342. [21532]

Mr. Fatchett: The Entry Clearance Officer at Islamabad authorised the issue of a settlement visa to Mr. Khan on 9 December. The Migration and Visa Correspondence Unit wrote to my hon. Friend on 16 December to inform him of this decision.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of Nasim Akhtar who has applied for a permit to join her husband Mr. Mohammed Iqbal of Mountbatten Court, Bradford; and what factors underlie the delay in processing this application. [21501]

Mr. Fatchett: Inquiries made in response to earlier representations from my hon. Friend show that there is no trace of an application from Mrs. Akhtar at the British High Commission at Islamabad.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the application for entry clearance by Mohammed Aurangyeb, Islamabad ref. IMM/D7004, was referred to the Home Office for further inquiries; what is the nature of those inquiries; and when he expects them to be completed and a decision made. [21531]

Mr. Fatchett: We have asked our High Commission in Islamabad to provide a detailed account of the position. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons, will write to my hon. Friend within one week of receiving that account.

Arms Exports

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of France towards establishing common principles for the licensing of arms exports as part of a European code of conduct. [19869]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have had a number of contacts at Ministerial and Official level with the French and other European Union Governments about a Code of Conduct on arms exports in the lead-up to formal consideration of a Code during the UK's Presidency of the Union in the first half of 1998.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the approval of an export licence for the supply to the Netherlands of shotgun ammunition intended for use in Bosnia. [21681]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We recently approved the export to The Netherlands of 2,500 rounds of CS gas and target-practice shotgun ammunitions for use in riot-control by Dutch UN armed forces in Bosnia. Given that the ammunition is needed to support peace-keeping activities in Bosnia and that it is important that UN forces in Bosnia, which include British troops, are able to protect themselves, we were glad to be able to approve this export as an exception to our interpretation of the EU arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia. This decision does not affect our continued support of the EU common position on arms exports to the former Yugoslavia.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Motorcycling

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set up a national motorcycle strategy group to discuss the role of motorcycling in an integrated transport policy. [20626]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My noble Friend the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Baroness Hayman, invited representatives of a wide range of groups including motorcyclists, pedestrians, cyclists and environmentalists, to a special seminar on 25 November to discuss the role of motorcycling in integrated transport. This discussion provided valuable information for us to consider policies on motorcycling in the integrated transport White Paper to be published next year.

Car Registrations

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to change the month in which new car registration letters are introduced; [20936]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of car registration plates. [20935]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government is proposing that, from March 1999, the age identification letter on vehicle registration plates should change every six months, in March and September. The current R prefix would therefore run until the end of July 1998, and S would run from August 1998 to the end of February 1999.

The current sequence of age identification letters should therefore expire in September 2001. Following the consultation exercise this year, we are currently discussing with the motor industry and other interested parties, including the police, a new vehicle registration format to run from that date. We intend to make a full announcement concerning the changes in the new year.

The Government is concerned at the use of non-standard fonts, which cause difficulties for the police. We intend to tighten the existing regulations, and to introduce a standard mandatory number-plate font. My Department is working with the British Standards Institution and representatives of the motor industry towards finalizing an appropriate standard.

Planning Inspectors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning inspectors are currently in post. [20943]

Mr. Raynsford: The Chief Planning Inspector, Chris Shepley, is responsible for providing information about the Planning Inspectorate's operational affairs. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from David Hanchet to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 18 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked Chris Shepley to reply to your Question about the number of Planning Inspectors. As he is on leave I am replying on his behalf.

As at 1 December 1997 there were 377 Planning Inspectors: 236 employed on a salaried basis and 141 who were fee-paid.

A449 (Safety)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what new proposals have been made by the Highways Agency to improve safety on the A449 between Kidderminster and Worcester; and if he will make a statement. [20759]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Peter Luff, dated 18 December 1997:

Glenda Jackson has asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency to reply to your question about what new proposals the Agency has to improve safety on the A449 between Kidderminster and Worcester. Lawrie Haynes, the Chief Executive has asked me to reply as he is away from the Office at present.

As you know, the Highways Agency shares your concern about the continuing accident problem on this section of the A449. The report we mentioned in our letter to you of 12 November was received earlier this month. It recommends a number of measures aimed at improving safety and reducing excessive traffic speed both in the short and longer term.

Now that we have had an opportunity to consider the report we propose to accept its recommendations for improved turning facilities at selected junctions (similar to those already in place at Hadley Turn), closing some of the gaps in the central reserve and introducing a 50 mph speed limit to be enforced by the introduction of speed cameras. We intend to implement the short term measures quickly for the immediate benefits they will bring.

As a first step we will discuss these proposals with the Parish Councils concerned early in the new year. We will also ensure that these measures are now worked up in greater detail to enable them to be displayed locally and implemented at the earliest possible opportunity next year.

Consultants have also been instructed to prepare proposals for the introduction of central reserve safety fencing along those parts of the route where it is not already in place.

The longer term solution will take more time to develop and statutory procedures will need to be completed. We will write to you again when we have more information to report on this matter.

In the meantime, I am sure that Tom Barry, Area Manager for the A449, would be happy to explain the proposals in more detail. Tom can be contacted on 0121-678-8366.

Drivers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the age of eligibility for drivers. [20934]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The prescribed minimum ages for driving different types of vehicle are set out below. However, the law allows lower minimum ages in special circumstances.

Age	*Vehicle*
16	Mopeds
17	Cars and other small vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes and with up to 8 passenger seats; motorbikes;
18	Goods vehicles between 3.5 and 7.5 tonnes;
21	Goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes and passenger vehicles with more than 8 seats.

The EC Driving Licence Directive, with which these accord, includes a derogation allowing cars to be driven at 17, rather than 18. There are no plans to change that or any other minimum age.

Christmas Island

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will evaluate the potential environmental hazards posed by the climatic changes arising from the El Niño phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean in respect of the rainfall and hurricane patterns affecting Christmas Island. [20785]

Mr. Meacher: During an El Niño event, there is a substantial increase in rainfall throughout the year in the central equatorial Pacific region which includes Christmas Island. Since the onset of the current major El Niño, rainfall has been well above average in this region since March 1997, and this pattern is expected to continue until El Niño declines, probably by the middle of next year.

As Christmas Island is close to the equator, it is extremely unlikely to experience hurricanes.

Royal Train

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many miles the Royal Train has travelled in the period January 1996 to date when carrying *(a)* the Queen, *(b)* the Prince of Wales and *(c)* other members of the Royal Family; and how many journeys were undertaken by persons in these categories. [21109]

Ms Glenda Jackson: From 1 January 1996 until 31 March 1997 the Royal Train travelled some 9,500 miles while carrying members of the Royal Family. During this period, nine journeys were undertaken by HM the Queen, 15 journeys by HRH the Prince of Wales, and 12 journeys by other members of the Royal Family.

From 1 April 1997, the costs of official Royal travel by rail and air have been met by the Royal Household. The arrangements under which grant-in-aid is paid to the Household to support these costs require the Household to prepare an annual report on the use that has been made of the grant-in-aid. Particulars of the journeys made by the Royal Train from 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 will be included in the first such annual report which is to be published and placed in the Library of the House within three months of the end of the financial year.

Millennium Experience

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans have been made to cope with the likely increase in the number of cars entering the Greenwich area to visit the Millennium Experience in 2000. [21260]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The vast majority of visitors to the Millennium Experience will travel by public transport using one of a variety of modes that will be available. There will be no car parking at the site, other than for orange badge holders, and a controlled parking zone stretching up to three kilometres from the site. Visitors will be encouraged to leave their cars and join public transport as close to home as possible. Park and ride or park and sail sites will also be available linked to the Experience by rail, bus or boat.

Leasehold Law

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about consultation on the reform of residential leasehold law. [20968]

Mr. Raynsford: We are committed to simplifying the current rules restricting the purchase of freeholds by leaseholders and are considering what other aspects of residential leasehold law might be reformed. We hope to issue a consultation paper next spring.

Road Traffic Act Appeals (Scotland)

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the 21 day time limit in Scotland for an appeal under section 100 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. [21236]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Appeals under section 100 are among those to which the Act of Sederunt (Sheriff Court Summary Application Rules) 1993 applies. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Road Tax Licences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many motor vehicle owners have been charged and convicted of not holding a current road tax licence since 1 January. [21380]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of people successfully prosecuted for Vehicle Excise Duty evasion since 1 January is 208,950.

In addition a further 246,188 evaders paid an out of court settlement.

West Sussex Structure Plan

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his recent decision regarding the West Sussex Structure Plan; and for what reasons he rejected the proposals made by the Examination in Public. [21777]

Mr. Raynsford: No. It would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to make a statement in view of the stated intention of West Sussex County Council to seek a judicial review of his decision. The reasons for the decision are set out in the letter accompanying my right hon. Friend's direction to the County Council and I am sending the hon. Member a copy.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his latest estimate of the total cost of resolving the computer millennium problem in *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he is responsible; what is in each case (i) expenditure incurred to date, (ii) expenditure planned for 1997–98, (iii) expenditure planned for 1998–99 and (iv) expenditure planned for 1999–2000. [21530]

Angela Eagle: The figures are provided in the following table:

£ million

	Latest estimate of total cost (£)	*Expenditure incurred to date (£)*	*Expenditure planned for*		
			1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
DETR (C)	2.2	0.2	0.5	1.5	0.2
Executive Agencies[1]	15.7	0.095	2.2	13.5	
Other Public Bodies[2]	n.a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] The figure includes £10.7 million estimated by the Highways Agency (HA) to upgrade traffic control systems and the like. This amount was not included in the statement made by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the House of Commons on 27 November 1997 concerning how Government Departments and their Agencies are tackling the Year 2000 Date Change Problem. This covered only the cost of achieving compliance in HA's IT systems (estimated at £4.3 million). HA has not been able to break down expenditure planned between 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

[2] Information on Y2000 costs for other public bodies is not maintained centrally.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what additional financial support will be made available to local authorities to allow them to achieve millennium computer compliance; and if he will make a statement. [21577]

Mr. Raynsford: The LGA's views on the pressures faced by authorities, including the costs of millennium compliance, were taken into account in our proposals for local government revenue expenditure in 1998–99.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the total cost to local authorities of achieving millennium computer compliance by 31 December 1999; and if he will make a statement. [21545]

Mr. Raynsford: The Local Government Association (LGA) highlighted the possible level of pressures local authorities might face in the coming financial year in preparing for millennium computer compliance. Their estimate was that spending of at least £100 million will be required in 1998–99, although they recognised that firm estimates are difficult to obtain. The LGA's views on the pressures faced by authorities were taken into account in our proposals for local government revenue expenditure in 1998–99.

Air Jamaica

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons his Department did not allow Air Jamaica rights to operate passenger flights to Manchester Airport in 1996. [21538]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Air services negotiations between the UK and Jamaica were held in Kingston on 24–26 January 1996. The question of allowing Air Jamaica to operate services to Manchester was discussed at the negotiations, but no agreement was reached. The UK negotiators considered that the conditions which the Jamaican authorities were seeking to attach to the service

would have damaged wider UK aviation interests. No representations have been made to the UK Government by Air Jamaica since those negotiations.

Asylum Seekers (Housing)

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to allow local authorities to use their own housing stock for asylum seekers where the authority is under a statutory duty to provide accommodation.[22012]

Ms Armstrong: The Government is currently undertaking a comprehensive spending review of asylum policy, including a review of the policy for providing support to asylum seekers. We recognise that some local authorities, particularly in London, are experiencing difficulties in accommodating asylum seekers to whom various statutory duties are owed.

Consequently, in response to a request from the Association of London Government, the Government proposes to make an Order under section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 which will allow local housing authorities in England and Wales to grant non-secure tenancies and licences in their own housing stock to asylum seekers to whom they owe a statutory duty to provide accommodation.

Authorities will also be able to let their housing stock to other landlords who intend to sub-let the accommodation, on a temporary basis, to asylum seekers who are owed a duty.

Additionally, I intend to invite the Housing Corporation to consider relaxing its guidance, in respect of the use of registered social landlords' long-term stock, to allow them some flexibility in supporting local authorities which owe a statutory duty to accommodate asylum seekers.

These proposals will form temporary arrangements only, and are without prejudice to the outcome of the comprehensive spending review.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes he proposes to make to regulations governing council tax enforcement, the levy of distress and houses in multiple occupation as a result of the consultation papers issued in September. [22013]

Ms Armstrong: I have today put a copy of a paper setting out our conclusions in response to the consultation exercise, and a list of all those that replied, in the House Library. Regulations will be laid before the House early in the New Year.

Construction Contracts

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to bring into effect the provisions on construction contracts which are contained in Part II of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. [22014]

Mr. Raynsford: I gave an assurance when we came into Government that I would implement the previous administration's legislation on fair construction contracts which had been introduced with cross-Party agreement. I am delighted now to be fulfilling that promise.

I have today laid an order which sets out the arrangements which need to be followed where construction contracts fail to contain adjudication and payment provisions which comply with the 1996 Act. I have also laid an order excluding certain types of contracts, and especially contracts under the Private Finance Initiative, from the terms of the Act.

These proposals are the result of detailed and comprehensive consultation with all sections of the construction industry. The adjudication provisions will help resolve construction disputes quickly and simply. I am looking to forward to the legislation coming into effect in the Spring.

Driving Licences

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about progress on including a photograph of the holder on driving licences. [22016]

Dr. Strang: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency will introduce photocard style driving licences from next summer.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Government's response to the Government Panel on Sustainable Development's Third Annual Report will be published. [22017]

Mr. Prescott: The Government's response to the Third Annual Report of the Government Panel on Sustainable Development has been published today. I am pleased that we have been able to respond positively to many of the Panel's recommendations. The Panel is a valuable source of advice for Government in the achievement of sustainable development, an issue which this Government has pledged will be at the heart of all policy-making. I wish to express my gratitude to the Convenor of the Panel, Sir Crispin Tickell, and his colleagues for their continued commitment to helping to identify new sustainable ways of enhancing the quality of life and prosperity for everyone.

Examples where the Government has been able to respond positively to the Panel's recommendations are:

- on Subsidies: action is being taken to see whether the objectives of subsidies are compatible with sustainable development
- on Aviation Fuel: the Prime Minister pressed for action at the UN Special Session in June
- on Climate change: the Government has set the pace internationally on targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions
- on Environmental Education: the Government has announced a new Environmental Education Panel, under the chairmanship of Sir Geoffrey Holland; commissioned the Council for Environmental Education to draft a code of good practice; and provided additional resources for the Environmental Action Fund

on Housing and Land Use Planning: the Government is looking at ways of using fiscal incentives to meet environmental objectives.

I am placing copies of the response in the Library.

Environment Council

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 16 December. [22084]

Mr. Meacher: I and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council on 16 December 1997.

The Council reached a common position on a regulation establishing common rules and procedures for the export of certain types of Community waste to certain non-OECD countries which will complete the regulatory regime controlling the export of non-hazardous waste to non-OECD countries.

The Council agreed conclusions on the Community's proposed strategy to combat acid rain. Ministers supported the Strategy in principle, but noted that the costs of the Commission's proposals were excessive and called for further work to be done to establish a sounder methodology. Conclusions were also agreed on the Community's Biodiversity Strategy, calling upon the Commission to produce the Strategy, which is required under the Biodiversity Strategy, by the end of January 1998.

In the discussion on the proposed directive to reduce emissions from light commercial vehicles, the Council reached a general understanding on the way forward, but the European Parliament's opinion is needed before Common Position can be reached. The Council also reached a broad measure of common understanding on the proposed Landfill Directive but again, a decision on a Common Position must await the European Parliament's opinion.

The Commission reported on progress on the Water Framework Directive and on environmental indicators and green national accounting. The Commission also made presentations on proposals for a directive to reduce emissions for heavy goods vehicles, a revised directive on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms, and a communication on Environment and Employment.

Over lunch, Ministers discussed the EU's approach to climate change in light of the outcome of the recent Kyoto conference. There was broad agreement that more work needed to be done urgently in a number of areas, including sinks, the clean development mechanism and emissions trading in the run up to the next negotiating session. This will be a priority during the UK Presidency, as will work to finalise the burden sharing among Member States on the EU target and to take forward common and co-ordinated policies and measures. Brief discussions were also held on the Community mechanism for monitoring greenhouse gas emissions and on Community action needed to control CO_2 emissions from cars.

After the conclusion of business, as is customary for the incoming Chair of the Council. I thanked the Luxembourg minister and his team for their hard work during their Presidency. I announced that the environment would be one of the key themes of the UK's Presidency overall and that in the Environment Council, we would take forward work on climate change, including the proposals on a CO_2 monitoring mechanism and CO_2 from cars; continue the work on landfill, emissions from light vans, sulphur content of liquid fuels, the Solvents Directive, revision of Directives on Biotechnology and the Water Framework Directive; and start discussion of new proposals on the Air Quality Daughter Directive, a directive on emissions from heavy goods vehicles, the European Environment Agency regulation, the Zoos Recommendation and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. We would prepare the EU position on a number of international events, including the Commission on Sustainable Development, the fourth Conference of Parties to the Biodiversity Convention and the Environment for Europe Conference. Finally, I also announced that there would be a joint session of the Environment and Transport Councils on 17 June and an Informal Council on 24–26 April, again with a joint session of environment and transport ministers.

Lead Shot

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he plans to restrict the use of lead shot over wetlands. [22085]

Mr. Meacher: My Department is considering the best legislative options to prohibit the use of lead shot over wetlands in the United Kingdom. Legislation will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time permits. This will enable the United Kingdom to meet its commitment under the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement to endeavour to phase out lead shot over wetlands by the year 2000. In the meantime the voluntary phase out of the use of lead shot over wetlands will continue.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has commissioned into the possible health effects of telecommunication masts transmitting microwaves. [21250]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has commissioned two studies on biological effects of microwaves as part of its Radiation Protection Research Programme. The first is investigating the influence of radiation on learning ability and behaviour. The other is a laboratory study looking for biological responses of human cells in an electromagnetic radiation field.

The Department is also contributing to the World Health Organisation International Electromagnetic Field Project which includes health effects of microwaves.

In addition, the Small Area Health Statistics Unit, on behalf of this and five other Government Departments, has investigated the incidence of leukaemia near 20 high power Television/FM transmitters in Great Britain. The study found that living close to a transmitter was not associated with an increased risk of leukaemia.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Smoking

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission when the Commission expects the House to become a non-smoking building. [21693]

Mr. Kirkwood: There are no current plans to designate any part of the Parliamentary Estate as a non-smoking building.

DEFENCE

Land Mines

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many land mines and anti-personnel mines have been destroyed through United Kingdom supported programmes since 1 May. [18959]

Dr. Reid: The Government provide financial and/or personnel support to a number of mine clearance programmes. Because some of these programmes are carried out by international organisations, the information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, the key measure used in such programmes is not the number of mines destroyed but the size of area cleared.

Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the *(a)* first and *(b)* last deliveries were made of the (i) Jaguar, (ii) Tornado F3, (iii) Tornado GR1 and (iv) RAF Harrier; and what is the life expectancy of each aircraft type. [20078]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is shown in the table:

Aircraft	*First delivery*	*Last delivery*	*Current planned out of service date*
Jaguar	1973	1982	2008
Tornado F3	1986	1993	2010
Tornado GR1	1980	1992	[1]2006
Harrier	1969	[2]1995	2015

Note:
[1] Those Tornado GR1s which are being upgraded to GR4 will have an out of service date of 2018.
[2] The first Harrier delivered was a GR1, the last Harrier delivered was a T-10. The out of service date relates to GR7 aircraft.

The Out of Service dates of each aircraft type are kept under review and are subject to change.

Gibraltar

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances NATO's Joint Sub-Regional Command (Madrid) wil be responsible for the operational command of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [20475]

Dr. Reid: NATO's Joint Sub-Regional Commands, once implemented, will have no permanently established boundaries or areas of responsibility. Regional Commanders will be able to propose the establishment of areas of responsibility for particular Joint Sub-Regional Commands in specific contingencies or missions. Such proposals will require the approval of all NATO nations. The defence and security of Gibraltar are, and will remain, the direct responsibility of the United Kingdom.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with which countries the DERA has been involved in collaborative research involving animals in the last 10 years. [20511]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from J. Chisholm to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 18 December 1999:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) I have been asked to reply to your question about which countries DERA has been involved with in collaborative research involving the use of animals over the past ten years.

DERA has been, and continues to be, involved in a large number of collaborative research programmes, a small number of which involve the use of animals by one or more of the partners. Information as to whether specific programmes include animal use is not collected centrally, and to look at agreements individually in order to identify those which involve animals would incur unreasonable costs.

However, in general terms, collaboration involving the exchange of data likely to have been generated from experiments involving animals occurs, or has occurred with the following countries—United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, France, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden and Germany.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the procedures which have been carried out on horses and *(b)* the number of horses involved in these procedures which have died as a result at (i) Porton Down and (ii) other establishments for which he is responsible in each of the last 10 years. [20468]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from J. Chisholm to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 18 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), I have been asked to reply to your questions about procedures carried out on horses at Porton Down and elsewhere.

The numbers of procedures carried out on horses at the Chemical and Biological Defence (CBD) Sector at Porton Down in each of the last 10 years are reported as follows:

Year	*Number of procedures*
1987	7
1988	1
1989	0
1990	50
1991	46
1992	44
1993	16

Year	Number of procedures
1994	0
1995	0
1996	0

Between 1987 and 1993, a total of eight horses were used as blood donors for the supply of normal blood used in the preparation of media for microbiology. The horses were bled in rotation and only small volumes, relative to the size of the animals, were taken. The removal of a small volume of blood every few weeks caused no ill effects in the animals and no animals died as a result of these procedures.

As you can see from the figures above, the relationship between the numbers of procedures, animals used and deaths is not necessarily a simple extrapolation. Further, there have been changes in the reporting requirements of the Home Office. For example, when the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was first introduced, it was agreed with the Home Office Inspectorate that multiple blood samples taken from a single horse would constitute one procedure. This changed in 1990, when a procedure was recorded each time a blood sample was taken.

There has been a continuing interest in the use of animals in defence research and the retrieval of information to answer this question has highlighted potential anomalies in the presentation and interpretation of statistics regarding animal experimentation. I refer to my replies to questions from Mr. Norman Baker MP and from yourself (Official Report Cols 174 and 172 dated 2 December 1997).

Specifically, in each case we presented the figures on animal experimentation as *returned annually to the Home Office*. However, there are differences in reporting requirements between the two Acts which have governed animal experimentation (the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 and Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986), and a subsequent revision in 1990 to the 1986 Act has required that the figures recorded are the numbers of procedures conducted rather than the numbers of animals involved.

As a result, there are some inconsistencies in the statistics over the period of time in which these changes took place. In the majority of cases, the number of procedures conducted equates to the number of animals used. During the investigations into this matter we have discovered that the over reporting also relates to sheep and dog usage but unfortunately the available data has not been recorded in a suitable manner to allow a reliable breakdown of information to be produced. Nevertheless, the gross statistics which have been provided are substantially correct and represent the *maximum* experimentation figures.

Finally, as far as the Defence Animal Centre is concerned, I can confirm that no procedures have been carried out on horses (and hence there have been no deaths) over the past 10 years.

I hope this answers your questions and clarifies the position.

HMS Invincible

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long HMS Invincible will remain in the Mediterranean. [21010]

Mr. George Robertson: The issue of UNSCOM access to Iraqi facilities is not yet resolved and we need to maintain vigilance. HMS Invincible and her detachment of RAF Harriers, together with the RFA Fort Victoria, will remain in the Mediterranean until further notice.

Smart Procurement

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the actions taken by the Procurement Executive to implement smart procurement measures. [21124]

Mr. Spellar: MOD is undertaking a fundamental and rigorous review of its procurement policies, procedures and practices. I have instituted wide consultation within MOD, well beyond the boundaries of the Procurement Executive, and also with Industry. Much work has already been done and I expect that formal recommendations will emerge early in the New Year. It will then be possible to outline the measures to be implemented.

Service Accommodation (Evictions)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision is made for households evicted from armed forces' housing estates; and what liaison takes place with local authorities to ensure that families are properly re-housed locally with particular reference to those households whose head is *(a)* unemployed and *(b)* on income support. [21325]

Mr. Spellar: The responsibility for finding alternative accommodation and contacting Local Authorities rests with the individual concerned. However, MOD are sensitive to the needs of the individuals and, where necessary, provide advice and assistance in liaison with Local Authorities and completion of the necessary paperwork. In addition, the Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO), a tri-Service organisation, provides housing advice on all aspects of housing needs including renting through the council to personnel from any of the three services and their dependants, and also separated partners who are occupying Service families accommodation.

Land Rovers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Series 3 Land Rovers have now been withdrawn from service with the Army; and if they have been disposed of. [21143]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* To date, 3,226 Series 3 Land Rovers have been withdrawn from service. Approximately 60 have so far been sold.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the 110 Series Land Rover has an exhaust emission which meets current EU regulations. [21148]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Trucks Utility Medium (High Specification) (TUM(HS)) 110 Series vehicles currently on order from Land Rover fully comply with current EU regulations.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about exhaust emissions of Army Land Rovers. [21147]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* I am not aware of any representations concerning exhaust emissions of Army Land Rovers being received.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the life of Series 3 Land Rovers. [21144]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* There are no plans to extend the in-service life of the Series 3 Land Rover.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Series 3 and *(b)* 110 Land Rovers are currently mothballed. [21146]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* There are no Series 3 or 110 Land Rovers currently mothballed.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 110 Series Land Rovers have been ordered by the Army; and how many have been delivered. [21145]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* A total of 6,029 Series 110 vehicles designated as Trucks Utility Medium (High Specifications), TUM(HS) have been ordered from Land Rover. To date 2,565 have been delivered.

SCOTLAND

Atholl and Breadalbane Fox Control Society

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support his Department has given to the Atholl and Breadalbane Fox Control Society in each year since 1990. [19522]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The information is in the table:

Financial year	*Grant paid (£)*
1990–91	4,375.99
1991–92	4,275.05
1992–93	5,635.26
1993–94	6,159.34
1994–95	7,334.17
1995–96	8,152.60
1996–97	6,843.15
1997–98	7,612.93

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to alter the financial support his Department gives to the Atholl and Breadalbane Fox Control Society. [19521]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The Fox Destruction Scheme under which Atholl and Breadalbane Fox Control Society and the other fox destruction clubs receive financial support is currently under review. A final decision on the future of the Scheme has not yet been made.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding financial support from his Department for the Atholl and Breadalbane Fox Control Society. [19523]

Mr. Macdonald: None.

New Deal

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the private sector to lead a partnership for the organisation and delivery of the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds; and if he will make a statement. [22128]

Mr. Dewar: I have selected Forth Valley as the area in Scotland for which competitive tenders will be sought from the private sector to lead partnerships for the organisation and delivery of the New Deal.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team since 2 May, specifying in each case *(a)* the participating Minister or Ministers, *(b)* the destination of the trip, *(c)* the purpose of the trip and *(d)* the cost of the trip; and if he will make a statement. [15248]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Details of European Council meetings attended by Ministers from 2 May to 31 October 1997 are shown in the table:

Date	*Place*	*Reason*	*Minister*	*Cost (£)*
19–20 May	Brussels	Agriculture Council	Lord Sewel	1,482.08
25–27 June	Luxembourg	Education Council	Brian Wilson	1,632.80
16 October	Luxembourg	Environment Council	Lord Sewel	3,147.20
20–21 October	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council	Lord Sewel	1,342.88
29–31 October	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Lord Sewel	3,160.32
In addition Ministers also undertook the following visits to promote or represent Scotland's interests abroad:				
12–14 May	Cannes	Launch Scottish Film Day	Sam Galbraith	4,156.99
1–2 June	Brussels	Meet EU Commissioners	Lord Sewel	1,979.26
20–21 August	Santiago	Attend Celtic Watersports Festival and tourism promotion	Brian Wilson	1,686.20
2–4 September	Copenhagen	Study tour of Danish sport participation and school sports	Sam Galbraith	2,305.08
20–28 September	USA	Inward investment and trade promotion	Secretary of State	13,059.50
8–9 October	Brussels	Meet EU Commissioners	Secretary of State	3,981.37
4–10 October	Hong-Kong, Taiwan and Japan	Inward investment and trade promotion	Brian Wilson	25,069.23
5–6 October	Munich	Fact finding mission for Scottish Parliament	Henry McLeish	4,907.32
7–9 October	Oslo and Tampere	Meet Norwegian and Finnish Ministers to discuss Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry and the EnvironmentLord Sewel	5,934.54	
20–22 October	Ireland	Gaelic related issues	Brian Wilson	498.00

Meningitis

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps the Government have taken to raise public awareness of meningitis, with particular reference to the university student population in Scotland. [20748]

Mr. Galbraith: It is vital that public awareness of meningococcal meningitis is maintained. Although relatively uncommon in Scotland, the infection can have potentially serious consequences. Prompt diagnosis and appropriate treatment can be lifesaving. Young children are the group most likely to be affected, but recently there has been an increase in the number of cases in young adults. The Health Education Board for Scotland publication "Birth to Five", which is issued to all new mothers in Scotland, includes information and advice about meningitis. Relevant information, produced by the Meningitis Research Foundation and the National Meningitis Trust, is issued routinely to students. The Scottish Office Department of Health is keeping the situation under review, in consultation with Health Board Consultants in Public Health Medicine.

WALES

Unoccupied Homes

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the total number of unoccupied homes in Wales (i) on 1 April 1990 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available; and what proportion was owned by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* central Government Departments, *(c)* the private sector, *(d)* housing associations and *(e)* others. [19941]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Complete information on the number of vacant dwellings is collected for local authority stock only. However, the available information on housing association stock and on homes owned by the Welsh Office is given below. Figures for homes owned by the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence in England and Wales were given in the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction to a question from the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) on 20 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *304*. These data are not readily available separately for Wales.

Available information on vacant dwellings

	April 1990	*March 1997*
Local authority dwellings	3,023	4,722
Housing association[1]	[2]1,154	[3]538
Welsh Office stock	n/a	[4]33

n/a = not available.

[1] These data are for all housing associations registered with Tai Cymru except Almshouse charities, Abbeyfield Societies and Co-ownership societies: they relate to units which may be either dwellings or bedspaces in special needs hostels or dwellings.

[2] At 31 March 1990.

[3] Excludes, in addition, special needs units.

[4] At 1 April 1997. Excludes NHS properties.

Primary Health Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to increase the role of primary health care in Wales. [20726]

Mr. Win Griffiths: On 17 July I announced a comprehensive package of measures designed to promote primary and community health care in Wales. Some £2.5 million has been set aside for these proposals, which include:

- an Equity Fund of £500,000 to address inequalities in Primary Care an additional £500,000 investment in training and education in general practice
- £300,000 to implement pilot schemes under the Primary Care Act
- a Primary Care Development Fund of £250,000 to fund innovative projects
- £200,000 to promote the wider use of pharmacists
- a further £250,000 made available to attract more dentists into Wales
- £150,000 to train nurses and health visitors to prescribe certain drugs
- establishing a fraud unit to address the problem of prescription fraud.

The NHS (Primary Care) Act 1997 allows those who wish to have additional flexibility, the opportunity to pilot different models for providing primary care services. These pilots offer scope to test new ideas with a view to improving the services presently available.

I shall shortly be publishing a White Paper on replacing the NHS internal market in Wales and this will include further proposals for developing primary care. The draft health authority allocations [to be] published on 15 December shows that health authorities in Wales will receive a 5 per cent. real terms increase in their cash limited allocations for General Medical Services for next year.

Beef

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the market for beef produced in Wales. [21244]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Government is considering farmers' concerns, and we hope to make a statement on the way forward shortly.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet TUC Wales to discuss the minimum wage; and if he will make a statement. [21243]

Mr. Ron Davies: No such meeting has been requested by the TUC Wales.

Road Building Schemes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to publish his plans for further road building schemes; and if he will make a statement. [21241]

Mr. Hain: The review of the forward trunk road programme announced in July is still at an early stage. It is not possible to say when we will be able to give any indications as to the size and composition of the future trunk road programme.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the number of starts which will be allocated to each TEC in Wales for modern apprenticeships in 1998–99. [21025]

Mr. Hain: Programme provision allows for a total of 4,500 modern apprenticeship starts in Wales in 1998–99. Details of the allocation of these starts to individual TECs will not be available until contract negotiations between both the Welsh Office and the TECs and between the TECs and their training providers have been concluded.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the number of starts allocated in 1996–97 to each TEC in Wales for modern apprenticeships; and what proportion of these starts had been used at the last available date. [21026]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Modern apprenticeship starts 1996–97

TEC	(i) Total modern apprenticeship starts planned at 1 April 1996	(ii) Total modern apprenticeship starts achieved at 30 March 1997	(ii) as a percentage of (i)
Gwent	894	996	111
Mid Glamorgan	653	644	99
North East Wales	500	520	104
North West Wales	400	441	96
Powys	129	115	89
South Glamorgan	560	602	108
West Wales	1,100	1,350	123
Wales total	4,296	4,668	109

Source:

TEC Management Information.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the change in each TEC budget for 1998–99. [20985]

Mr. Hain: The budgets of individual TECs for 1998–99 will not be known until finalisation of their business plans following negotiation next year. However, total funding for Government programmes delivered through TECs (including the TEC Management Fee, Training for Work allowances and other central costs) will decrease from £118.1 million to £110.1 million (6.8 per cent.) between 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the programmes for TECs in Wales which will receive a reduced allocation in 1998–99. [20984]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is as follows:

Programmes delivered through TECs

£ million

	1997–98 plans	1998–99 plans
Youth Training and Youth Credits	63.4	61.4
Education-Business Links	3.0	3.0
Training for Work	22.7	15.5
Business and Enterprise Support	10.4	7.5
Contribution to TEC Management Costs	7.5	7.1

The figures include Training for Work allowances and other central costs. The reduction in the Education-Business Links budget (£50,000) does not show in the roundings to the nearest £0.1 million.

River Dee Bridge

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the new River Dee bridge to be open to traffic; and if he will make a statement. [21242]

Mr. Hain: Flintshire County Council are responsible for this scheme. They now estimate the opening to take place in February–March.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what expenditure under the welfare to work New Deal will be allocated to Wales in 1998–99. [20983]

Mr. Hain: The financial estimates relating to the New Deal for 1998–99 will not be finalised until the end of January so I am not able at this time to say exactly what the planned expenditure for Wales will be. I will write to my hon. Friend once the figure is known, and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Student Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students are applying to university colleges in Wales for 1998 admission, broken down by constituencies in Wales. [21240]

Mr. Hain: Information on university applications is held centrally by the University and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS). Entry data for 1998 is unavailable at present but would not be available on a constituency basis. UCAS intend issuing a statement on 19 December 1997.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the number of staffed acute beds in use for each of the last 10 years. [21404]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is given in the following table:

Average daily available acute beds in NHS hospitals in Wales[1]

	Number
1987–88	9,463
1988–89	9,376
1989–90	9,139
1990–91	9,056
1991–92	8,835
1992–93	8,659
1993–94	8,441

Average daily available acute beds in NHS hospitals in Wales[1]

	Number
1994–95	8,479
1995–96	8,439
1996–97	8,619

[1] Excluding beds in psychiatric, maternity and geriatric specialties.

NHS Staff

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many vacant positions there were in each of the last five years for *(a)* hospital doctors, *(b)* general practitioners and *(c)* nurses. [21356]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on vacant positions is only collected for hospital doctors. The number of vacant posts in each of the last five years was as follows:

Posts vacant as at 30 September

	Number
1992	58
1993	61
1994	78
1995	75
1996	47

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the projected shortfall for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 for (i) hospital doctors, (ii) general practitioners and (iii) nurses. [21357]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is not collected centrally but estimates of any projected shortfall may be obtainable from trusts, health authorities, and in the case of GPs, from the Medical Practices Committee.

Medical and Dental Students

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the source of the funding for the special support covering tuition fees beyond year four for Welsh medical and dental students studying at a Scottish medical school. [20097]

Mr. Galbraith: I am replying on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It is the Government's intention that all eligible UK medical and dental students should benefit from the special provisions announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 23 September. The arrangements will be the subject of further discussions between the departments concerned.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Irian Jaya

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will raise the situation of the population of Irian Jaya with the Indonesian authorities with particular reference to problems relating to food distribution on the Island. [21422]

Mr. Foulkes: The Indonesian authorities are aware of the international concern regarding the situation in Irian Jaya. Indonesian NGOs such as Indonesian Red Cross and Caritas Indonesia are actively participating in the relief process. The international donor community is also committed to alleviating the desperate plight of those affected, including improvements to the food distribution process.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which non-governmental aid organisations have notified her Department that they are working in Irian Jaya. [21423]

Mr. Foulkes: We have been notified by World Vision, International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) of their activities in Irian Jaya. From the regular reports that we receive from UNDHA we are aware that Care International, Caritas Indonesia, Indonesian Red Cross, UNICEF and UNDP are also active in the area.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to assist the population of Irian Jaya. [21421]

Mr. Foulkes: We have been monitoring the situation closely through out Embassy in Jakarta and the United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) in Geneva. We have provided UNHDA with US$90,000 towards the immediate relief needs of those affected. We have also contributed £75,000 to International Red Cross Committee's appeal for support to (i) assess the nutritional status of the Irianese and assisting with relief aid, (ii) evaluate hygiene conditions and improving access to safe drinking water through water and sanitation programmes and (iii) provide medical assistance. We are also expecting a proposal from World Vision, a well respected non-government organisation, which we are prepared to consider favourably.

North Korea

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian aid the United Kingdom gives to North Korea. [21684]

Mr. Foulkes: The UK share of the EC programme of humanitarian aid for North Korea over the past year exceeds £6 million.

In addition, since 1995 we have committed over £1 million in emergency humanitarian aid to North Korea. This includes assistance this year through the International Federation of the Red Cross of £495,000 for food distribution and £80,000 to assist people affected by typhoon floods in west coast provinces.

Land Mines (Egypt)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate her Department has made of the number of land mines which remain in Egypt which were laid *(a)* by British forces, *(b)* by other allied forces and *(c)* in total. [20631]

Dr. Reid: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Accounting Officers

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what circumstances; and on what dates. [19212]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* In the last five years no written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries or other accounting officers from the six Northern Ireland departments or the NIO.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which foreign military, security and police personnel have received training by the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and at which locations such training was provided in each of the last five years. [20012]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1992 the RUC have provided training on three occasions to overseas police personnel. Two superintendents from Botswana (1992), seven senior ranking Indian police officers (1993) and one American officer (1997) received training from the RUC. This training took place within Northern Ireland.

Cattle Slaughter

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many bulls were slaughtered in Northern Ireland *(a)* during the most recent 12 month period for which figures are available and *(b)* in the previous 12 month period; and if she will make a statement on the reasons for the differences between those figures. [20346]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The most recent 12 month period for which Northern Ireland bull slaughter figures are available is for the 12 months ended 31 October 1997. During that period 14,375 bulls were slaughtered compared to 29,201 in the previous 12 month period.

There has been a decline in the number of bulls slaughtered in Northern Ireland due to the loss of export markets, following the introduction in March 1996 of the European Union's ban on the export of United Kingdom beef.

Police

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will seek to amend the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill to redefine the role and responsibilities of the Police Association for Northern Ireland to ensure that it complies with current best practice in the conduct of elections. [20909]

Mr. Ingram: I have no immediate plans to revise the terms of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill to redefine the role and responsibilities of the Police Association for Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when and for what reasons a senior official of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland was suspended in 1996; how many other officials were suspended or put under investigation; when the investigation was concluded; and what its outcome was. [20794]

Mr. Ingram: A senior official of the Police Authority was suspended on 7 October 1996 in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Code, to enable an investigation to take place. Two other officials were suspended and investigations were conducted into the actions of these three and one other official.

The investigations into suspected irregularities in procedures have been completed. One official has been dismissed and criminal proceedings against him remain under consideration by the police. A senior official has had his appeal against disciplinary action upheld and no disciplinary action was directed against two other officials.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will *(a)* publish the rules which will apply to the forthcoming elections for office in the Police Association for Northern Ireland, *(b)* encourage the Chief Constable to appoint independent scrutineers and *(c)* appoint a committee to review the conduct of such elections. [20905]

Mr. Ingram: Members of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland will be taking part in elections in the New Year held in accordance with rules made under the terms of Regulation 23 of the Police Association for Northern Ireland Regulations 1991. I shall arrange for a copy of those Rules to be placed in the Library. I have no plans to amend those Rules in relation to the appointment of scrutineers or to appoint a committee to review the conduct of such elections.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of recent public statements by the Chairman of the Police Association for Northern Ireland; what representations she has made to the Chief Constable about them; and if the statements constitute breaches of the statutory role of the Association or of RUC discipline. [20904]

Mr. Ingram: I have not given express consideration to any recent public statements made by the Chairman of the Police Association for Northern Ireland neither have I made representations to the Chief Constable about them constituting breaches of the statutory role of the Association or of RUC discipline.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number and purpose of official journeys outside Northern Ireland undertaken by the Secretary and Chief Executive of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997 to date. [20751]

Mr. Ingram: The official journeys outside Northern Ireland undertaken by the Secretary and Chief Executive of the Police authority in each of the past three years are as follows:

	Journeys
1995	8
1996	14
1997 (to date)	9

All these journeys were undertaken for the purpose of, either, the official business of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland or the National Training Awards Scheme.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to review the definitions of the words welfare and efficiency in the context of the legislation governing the role and activities of the Police Association for Northern Ireland. [20903]

Mr. Ingram: I have no immediate plans to review the definition of the words welfare and efficiency where they are used in the legislation relating to the representation of members of the RUC by the Police Association for Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what monies or benefits in kind are provided from public funds to the Police Association for Northern Ireland. [20789]

Mr. Ingram: The Police Association for Northern Ireland comprises three sections. Grants made to each section by the Police Authority are set out below:

Police Federation for Northern Ireland

95 per cent. of salary costs of full time officials;

the cost of travel of full time officials; and

80 per cent. of the Police Federation's expenditure on the running costs of the Federation's Headquarters office accommodation.

The total grants in the current year will be in the order of £200,000.

Superintendents' Association for Northern Ireland

In the current year a grant of £6,500 has been made in respect of travel.

Association of Chief Police Officers

This year's payment to the association's National Secretariat has not yet been negotiated. Last year's was £23,000.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations the Police Authority for Northern Ireland has made to her about ensuring a neutral working environment in all RUC and Police Authority establishments in line with established fair employment legislation. [20906]

Mr. Ingram: The issue of a neutral working environment has been the subject of separate and composite representations from the Police Authority on several occasions in recent years. These have included presentation in March 1996 of a Consultation report "Everyone's Police—A Partnership for Change", correspondence and discussions with the last Secretary of State and Minister of State during 1996 and coverage within the Annual Report of the Police Authority which was presented to the Secretary of State in June 1997.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions she has had with the Chairman of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland concerning the importance of retaining public confidence in the RUC in its dealings with the entire community in Northern Ireland. [20792]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Chairman and Secretary of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland on Wednesday 10 December, to discuss a number of matters connected with policing arrangements in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend also attended the Federation Conference in June.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the attendance record of each member of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland from July 1997 to date at *(a)* regular monthly authority meetings, *(b)* special authority meetings, *(c)* meetings of each sub-committee and *(d)* visits to authority and RUC establishments. [20762]

Mr. Ingram: The attendance record for the period July–November 1997 is as follows:

	(a) Regular monthly authority meetings	*(b) Special authority meetings*	*(c) Committee meetings*[1]	*(d) Visits*[2]
Mr. P. J. Armstrong	5	4	4	—
Lt. Col. R. H. Bicker	4	4	8	—
Mr. H. B. Casey	5	3	14	—
Mr. R. Coulter	4	4	12	4
Mr. R. L. Cree	4	2	7	4
Mr. R. Empey	2	2	6	1
Mrs. K Hargan	4	1	6	—
Mr. A. R. A. Huston	4	4	9	4
Mr. J. McDonald	5	4	14	—
Mr. N. O'Loan	5	3	15	—
Mrs. R. Peters–Gallagher	4	3	11	—
Mrs. E. Rea	3	4	9	—
Mrs. F. Reid	5	4	13	5
Mrs. G. A. Rice	4	3	12	3
Mr. F. Rocks	5	3	13	—
Nr. R. Spence	2	2	9	1
Prof. H. Wallace	3	4	4	1
Mr. T. Wilson	4	2	11	4
Member[3]	5	4	9	3

[1] Committee meetings are meetings of the Authority's Policy Co-ordinating Committee, General Purposes Committee, Support Services Committee, Community Relations Committee, Finance and Personnel Committee and Audit Committee.

[2] These visits were undertaken by the Authority's Support Services Committee.

[3] Authority Member whose name is not in the public domain.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times the Police Authority for Northern Ireland's working group on public accountability and communication with the public has met since its appointment in April 1996; when its work will be complete; and if its findings will be published. [20756]

Mr. Ingram: The Authority's Working Group on Openness and Accountability met on six occasions between 24 April 1996 and its final meeting on 28 November 1996. The Working Group's recommendations were considered by the Authority during its meeting in December 1996 and, on 8 April 1997, two codes of practice were published and a press conference was held.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what matters have been investigated in the operations of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland following the suspension of a senior official in 1996; and what steps have been taken *(a)* in respect of that official and *(b)* in other respects arising from the investigation. [20765]

Mr. Ingram: Procedures relating to the letting of contracts, the proper maintenance of appropriate documentation and adherence to proper procedures were investigated. The senior official concerned was suspended on full pay pending investigation and the matter dealt with through the Disciplinary Code. A subsequent appeal, by the senior official, against disciplinary action was upheld. Purchasing and approval procedures have been thoroughly revised and are now being applied.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the interests declared and registered by members of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. [20755]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is set out below:

Police authority for Northern Ireland Register of Interests

Name	*Interest registered*	
Mr. P. J. Armstrong (Chairman)	Catholic Family Care Society	Management Committee Member
	Childcare (NI)	Executive Committee Member
	British Association of Social Workers	Member
	Northern Association of Justices of the Peace	Member
Professor H. Wallace (Vice-Chairman)	None	
Lt. Col. R. H. Bicker	Litton Group Ltd.	Director
	Down District Council	Local Councillor (Ulster Unionist Party)
Mr. H. B. Casey	None	
Mr. R. J. Coulter	Ballymena Borough Council	Alderman (Ulster Unionist Party)
	Northern Ireland Forum	Chief Whip (Ulster Unionist Party)
	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe	Member
	CLRAE Working Group on Crime and Insecurity in the Urban Situation	Member
	Citizens' Advice Bureau, Ballymena	Trustee
	Galgorm and Gracehill Preservation Trust	Member
	Orange and Royal Black Institutions	Nominal Member
Mr. R. L. Cree	North Down Borough Council	Local Councillor (Ulster Unionist Party)
	Member of the Orange, Black and Masonic Institutions	
Mr. R. Empey	Belfast City Council	Local Councillor (Ulster Unionist Party)
	Orange Order	Member
	Royal Black Institution	Member
	Walkway Community Association	Member
Mr. K. F. Hargan	Lumen Christi College, Derry	Member of Board of Governors
Mr. A. R. A. Huston	Federation of Small Businesses (NI) Region	Vice-Chairman
	Lord Chancellor's Legal and Advisory Committee	Member
	HM Young Offenders' Centre, Hydebank Wood	Member of Visiting Committee
Mr. J. O. McDonald	Justice of the Peace	
	Independent Assessor of Military Complaints	
	RUC Museum	Trustee
	RUC Historical Society	Member
	An Garda Siochana Historical Society	Member
	Knights of St. Columbanus	Member
	Association of Papal Knights in Ireland	Secretary
Mrs. N. P. O'Loan	NI Consumer Committee for Electricity	Chairperson
	ACCORD	Chairperson
	Ballymena Swimming Club	Chairperson
	Victim Support	Person
	Women Together for Peace	Member
Mrs. R. I. Peters-Gallagher	Witt Thornton, Chartered Accountants	Partner
	Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland	
	Lerwill House Ltd.	Member of Management Committee
Mrs. E. Rea	Elsbeth Rea Associates	Principal
	North Down and Ards Home Start	Non Executive Director and Company Secretary
Mrs. F. Reid	None	
Mrs. G. A. Rice	Castlereagh Borough Council	Council Member (Alliance Party)
Mr. F. P. Rocks	Ancient Order of Hibernians	Member
	Cookstown and Magherafelt Lions Club	Drugs Awareness Officer of the Lions Club
	Trade Union—Unison	Member

Police authority for Northern Ireland Register of Interests

Name	*Interest registered*	
Mr. R. A. J. Spence	Honorary Lecturer, Department of Surgery, Queen's University, Belfast Institute of Directors	Member
	Board of Trustees and Governor, Wallace High School	
	Crimestoppers (Northern Ireland)	Board Member
	Cancer Services, Belfast City Hospital	Chairman
Mr. T. J. Wilson	Cookstown District Council	District Councillor (Ulster Unionist Party)
	Orange Order	Member
	Royal Black Institution	Member
	Apprentice Boys of Derry	Member
	Royal Arch Purple Institution	Member
	Masonic Lodge	Member
	GMB Trade Union	Member

One Member of the Authority, whose name is not in the public domain, has been given an exemption under Paragraph 14 of the Authority's Code of Conduct from listing his/her interests.

Union Flag (Police Stations)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will request the Police Authority and Chief Constable to review the list of days and occasions when the Union flag is flown over police stations. [20763]

Mr. Ingram: The flying of the Union Flag over police stations in Northern Ireland is a matter to be dealt with by the Chief Constable.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations the Police Authority for Northern Ireland has made to her about the list of days and occasions when the Union Flag is flown over police stations. [20908]

Mr. Ingram: The Police Authority for Northern Ireland presented its annual report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in June 1997; this included details of the Authority's views on the flying of the Union Flag over police stations. The matter was also discussed with the Authority at a meeting on 15 October 1997.

Students (Second Degrees)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the support her Department will make available to students who chose medicine or dentistry as a second degree. [20777]

Mr. Worthington: A student who has already been on a course for which he has received support from public funds is precluded under the provisions of the Students' Regulations (Northern Ireland) from receiving an award to undertake a second first degree course in medicine, dentistry or any other subject. Such a student is eligible, however, to apply for a student loan towards his living costs. These rules will continue to apply to new students in 1998–99.

Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals DENI has for further research on aspects of the Coopers and Lybrand report. [21231]

Mr. Worthington: The question of any further research on the issues raised in the Coopers and Lybrand Report on LMS formula funding will be considered further now that the interim proposals for 1998–99 have been finalised.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is DENI's timetable for the implementation of full commonality in the LMS formula. [21228]

Mr. Worthington: The timetable for the implementation of full commonality in LMS funding formulae will be determined following further consultation and discussion with interested parties.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time, non-teaching employees of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools *(a)* there are currently and *(b)* there were in 1993–94. [21267]

Mr. Worthington: The information is as follows:

	Number
Currently employed	48
Employed in 1993–94	34

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand report proposal that the social deprivation factor in the LMS formula should quantify objectively the extra costs likely to be incurred by schools in educating pupils from socially deprived backgrounds and *(b)* the cost per pupil of that proposal. [21230]

Mr. Worthington: No detailed assessment has yet been made of the Coopers and Lybrand proposals relating to social deprivation. Part of that assessment will be the availability of working criteria for the inter-related factor of educational need.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals she has to introduce arrangements by which the views of controlled schools can be represented to her and to the DENI analogous to the arrangements available to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. [21308]

Mr. Worthington: Adequate arrangements are already in place to ensure that the views of schools of all types can be represented to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to the Department of Education in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many principals and vice-principals of maintained schools who took early retirement from teaching, are currently employed, full-time or part-time by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. [21269]

Mr. Worthington: Two former principals who took early retirement are currently employed on a full-time basis by the Council.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the perceived religious affiliations of non-teaching employees of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools were last monitored by the FEC. [21266]

Mr. Ingram: In common with all other specified Public Authorities the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is required to monitor the religious composition of its workforce on an annual basis. The CCMS last monitored the perceived community background of its non-teaching employees on 1 January 1997. This information will be publishing in March 1998.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the perceived religious affiliations of present, non-teaching employees, of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. [21268]

Mr. Ingram: The latest published monitoring information is contained in the FEC's Seventh Annual Monitoring Report (March 1997). That document shows that at 1 January 1996, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools had 40 employees of whom less than 10 were determined as being from the Protestant community.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account her Department took of the Museums Association Code of Practice for Museum Governing Bodies in the preparation of the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997. [21134]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Department took into account the comments received from the Museums Association on the proposal for a draft Order. Its comments would obviously reflect its code of practice.

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997, what representations were received from the Museums and Galleries Commission on the subject of powers to override trusts or conditions which prohibit or restrict the disposal of objects donated to museums and galleries. [21132]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) expressed concern that the powers of disposal contained within the first draft Order which was published in March 1997 were too wide-ranging and suggested wording similar to that used in Scottish legislation.

These views were taken into account in framing the revised draft which was laid on 25 November 1997 and which restricted the circumstances in which disposal could be considered.

On the day the draft Order was considered by Parliament, the Government received a letter from MGC expressing the view that although the revised draft represented overall a considerable improvement, they considered that the revised wording allowed scope for disposal beyond what they considered appropriate.

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account her Department took of the guidance in the Department of National Heritage Review of Museum Policy in the preparation of the draft Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1997. [21135]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* As the policy document "Treasures in Trust" was essentially an English document relating to English museums, it was not taken into account in detail by the previous Government when it proposed the draft Order. However, account was taken of many of the general principles expressed, where appropriate.

Public Order Offences

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been charged in relation to public order offences arising from incidents at *(a)* Portadown Town Centre, *(b)* Drumcree Church, *(c)* Brownstown Road, Portadown and *(d)* Garvaghy Road, Portadown, in each of the last five years. [20071]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The information is not available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate costs to provide.

NHS Staff

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vacant positions there were in each of the last five years for *(a)* hospital doctors, *(b)* general practitioners and *(c)* nurses. [21360]

Mr. Worthington: The information is not held centrally in respect of hospital doctors and nurses. The following table shows the number of general medical practitioner vacancies in each of the last five years, all of which were filled.

	Vacancies
1993	59
1994	52
1995	59
1996	40
1997	49

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the projected shortfall for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 for (i) hospital doctors, (ii) general practitioners and (iii) nurses. [21361]

Mr. Worthington: Sufficient numbers of suitably qualified staff are available or in training to meet the projected needs of HSS Trusts and General Practice. There is therefore no expected shortfall.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will estimate the number of staffed acute beds in use for each of the last 10 years. [21405]

Mr. Worthington: The following table details the average number of beds which were available in wards

open overnight in the Acute Services Programme of Care in Northern Ireland.

	Average number
1987	6,409
1988–89	6,107
1989–90	5,849
1990–91	5,634
1991–92	5,438
1992–93	5,281
1993–94	5,040
1994–95	4,813
1995–96	4,692
1996–97	4,454

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give a breakdown of the country of origin of beef imports in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [20256]

Mr. Rooker: UK beef imports for the period September 1996 to August 1997 as recorded in the Overseas Trade Statistics are shown in the table. For trade within the European Community, it is not possible to give a breakdown by country of origin. Instead data are shown by the country from which the goods were despatched.

UK beef imports from September 1996 to August 1997

		Carcass Meat		*Offal*		*Prepared or preserved*		*All beef*	
	Country of despatch[1]	*Tonnes*	*£000*	*Tonnes*	*£000*	*Tonnes*	*£000*	*Tonnes*	*£000*
EC	Irish Republic	51,979	110,269	4,460	2,344	14,225	28,900	70,664	141,513
	Netherlands	15,567	34,050	1,822	1,491	197	690	17,585	36,231
	Germany	7,457	12,498	799	331	75	66	8,331	12,895
	France	4,471	7,692	1,472	708	—	—	5,942	8,400
	Belgium-Luxembourg	1,495	2,666	—	—	—	—	1,495	2,666
	Spain	1,003	2,331	129	38	—	—	1,133	2,369
	Denmark	502	1,227	—	—	—	—	502	1,227
	Italy	248	381	68	21	—	—	316	401
	Other	585	1,459	668	403	757	3,229	2,010	5,091
Non-EC	Country of origin								
	Brazil	3,875	12,851	—	—	34,292	54,324	38,167	67,175
	Argentina	9,007	17,518	—	—	15,176	23,086	24,182	40,604
	Uruguay	11,584	22,476	—	—	4,542	6,122	16,126	28,598
	Australia	7,860	25,279	421	429	—	—	8,281	25,708
	Zimbabwe	5,060	17,138	—	—	2,316	4,286	7,376	21,424
	Botswana	5,669	16,329	—	—	320	672	5,989	17,001
	Namibia	4,792	15,722	—	—	—	—	4,792	15,722
	New Zealand	4,588	7,893	254	299	—	—	4,842	8,192
	Mauritius	—	—	—	—	3,262	5,584	3,262	5,584
	U.S.A.	1,382	3,701	57	30	—	—	1,439	3,731
	Other	528	1,815	768	749	429	761	1,586	2,986
Total imports from EC countries		83,307	172,572	9,417	5,336	15,253	32,886	107,978	210,793
Total imports from non-EC countries		54,344	140,721	1,500	1,507	60,335	94,836	116,180	237,064
Total UK imports		137,866	313,515	10,966	6,904	75,628	127,780	224,459	448,199

[1] Some trade may originate from outside the European Community. All data is provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he will take to ensure that beef which is being imported from Europe is *(a)* free of BSE and *(b)* from a herd with no history of BSE. [21583]

Mr. Rooker: Animals showing clinical signs of BSE would not be slaughtered for human consumption in the European Union. Animals which might be incubating the disease at a stage too early to show clinical signs could be slaughtered for human consumption which is why the Government have extended their controls to ensure that the specified risk material is removed from imported beef from 1 January 1998.

The United Kingdom Government do not have a policy of banning beef from the domestic market from herds which have a case of BSE in the United Kingdom and there is therefore no basis on which we could apply standards to imports which we did not regard as necessary for our domestic production.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the safety of vitamin and mineral supplements; and if he will make a statement. [21660]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are concerned about the potential adverse effects of high-dose vitamin and mineral supplements. In view of these concerns, the Minister for Public Health and I have agreed that an ad hoc Expert Group should be established to consider the general principles on which maximum levels of vitamins and minerals in supplements sold under food law could be set.

The Expert Group will review the available science, and recommend maximum levels for a range of nutrients if appropriate. The Expert Group may also wish to provide advice on the addition of vitamins and minerals to foods. It will report to the Food Advisory Committee (FAC) which will consider the Group's findings and make recommendations to Ministers. The Committee on Safety in Medicines (CSM) will also wish to consider the Report as it may have implications for the way that medicinal products containing vitamins and minerals are licensed. The conclusions of the review will also be used to inform any discussions in Brussels on the possible harmonisation of controls on food supplements and on fortified foods.

The Expert Group will comprise of a number of experts from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA); the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT); CSM and FAC.

In order to ensure transparency in the process, an observer from each of the main interest groups—the health food industry, the food industry, complementary medicine interests and consumer organisations—will be invited to meetings of the Expert Group. Interested parties will also be given the opportunity to make written submissions to the Expert Group. It is expected that the expert Group will take 18 months to two years to complete its task.

The establishment of this Expert Group will not affect the decision to introduce legislation to control the maximum level of vitamin B6 allowed in dietary supplements.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 15 to 16 December; and if he will make a statement. [21662]

Dr. John Cunningham: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the European Union Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels on 15 and 16 December. I was accompanied by my noble friend, the Lord Donoughue, Parliamentary Secretary responsible for farming and the food industry.

I informed my Ministerial colleagues of developments in relation to BSE, in particular my decision to ban from 1 January 1998 the import into the United Kingdom of meat from which the specified risk material had not been removed. This decision had been taken in the light of the postponement for three months of an EU-wide ban on such material. I also informed the Council of the prohibition which I had announced on 3 December in relation to the marketing of bone-in beef in the light of the scientific evidence which I had received from SEAC.

The Council considered and reached agreement on two animal welfare measures: one attaching welfare conditions to the payment of export refunds, which was adopted unanimously, the other laying down standards for vehicles used for the transport of animals. The latter was agreed in principle by qualified majority, with my Swedish and Danish colleagues and I unable to support the measure on the grounds that the standards of animal protection would be insufficiently high, and difficult to police. Detailed texts implementing this agreement will be considered early in the United Kingdom Presidency.

The Council discussed at some length a Commission report on the impact of third country trade agreements on the EU's Mediterranean producers. I insisted that, in drawing conclusions on this matter, the Council should have available to it an assessment of the trade benefits of such agreements to the EU as well as the impact on EU producers. The Council also considered a report from the Commission on progress in the negotiations on a veterinary equivalence agreement with the US. It noted that, although the conditions were not yet right for concluding that agreement, the Commission should continue its negotiations with a view to reaching a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible in the new year.

Amongst other matters discussed and agreed at the Council were measures on the granting of national aid to sugar beet producers in Portugal (Italy voting against); and extension of the temporary derogations for imports of wine from the US (Portugal voting against); rules governing veterinary checks on products entering the EU from third countries (by unanimity); and a proposal consolidating the drinking milk regulation (Greece and Denmark voting against).

The Irish Minister raised in the Council his Government's concerns over the recent interruptions to trade between the UK and the Republic of Ireland as a result of UK farmers' protests at ports; but he emphasised the close co-operation which exists between the two Governments in seeking to resolve this matter. I stressed the absolute commitment of the Government to maintaining the rule of law, and our intention to do everything necessary to allow the unimpeded movement of goods within the EU single market.

CJD

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the percentage risk of contracting CJD from consuming 1kg of beef on-the-bone sourced from cattle born after 1 August 1996; and if he will make a statement. [21597]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the advice given to the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) on 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *134*.

The risk assessments undertaken by SEAC relate to consumption in 1998 which would primarily be from beef born before 1 August 1996. The risk in later years would decline with the expectation that the incidence of disease in British cattle would continue to decline.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem include costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21565]

Mr. Morley: I can confirm that the Department's latest estimate of the total cost of resolving the millennium compliance problem amounts to £11.1 million, of which £4.1 million relates to the embedded chip problem.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what millennium compliance problems have occurred to date in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* other public bodies; and if he will make a statement. [21560]

Mr. Morley: Problems encountered when preparing for the millennium include those of a general nature, such as clearly defining the scope of the Department's (including Agency) millennium programme/project(s), as well as resourcing and prioritisation issues. Lower-level problems have been encountered in obtaining required assurances from suppliers of systems/products, identifying risks and required contingency actions (including identifying replacement suppliers/products where necessary). With regard to IT application systems, though the millennium is still two years away, some problems have already appeared—for example problems have been identified (and addressed) on a computer system which is concerned with processing five-year forward-looking agreements, where the termination date falls in the new millennium. Non-Departmental Public Bodies sponsored by the Department do not fall directly within the scope of the Department's millennium programme, but all relevant bodies have been asked to progress essential preparations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Locate in Scotland

17. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent communications her Department has had with Locate in Scotland on inward investment issues. [19885]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My officials and those at Locate in Scotland are in regular contact on inward investment issues and they continue to work in partnership under the Committee on Overseas Promotion arrangements.

Regional Development Agencies

18. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to ensure that her Department's responsibilities are co-ordinated with the proposed regional development agencies. [19886]

Mr. Ian McCartney: As set out in the White Paper "Building Partnerships for Prosperity"—which has received a warm welcome since it was published at the beginning of the month—regional development agencies will work very closely with my Department on a wide range of activities. Last week, the Government presented to the House a Bill for establishing these agencies. My Department is now working on detailed arrangements for ensuring that these agencies are up and running on 1 April 1999, supporting and enhancing DTI work in ways which meet regional needs.

Late Payment

19. **Mr. Quinn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on establishing a statutory right to interest on the late payment of debt. [19887]

Mrs. Roche: I am delighted to say that the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill was introduced in the other place on 10 December and published the next day. We expect the second Reading to take place on Monday 12 January.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will place in the Library copies of all the responses to the Green Paper on "Improving the Payment Culture". [21129]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* A schedule of all responses received, except those where the author specifically requested that their response not be published, was placed in the Library of the House upon publication of the Bill, on Thursday 11 December 1997. The full responses were, in accordance with current guidelines from the Library of the House, placed in the DTI library.

The House Library will be able to obtain copies of these responses from the DTI's library on request.

RJB Mining plc

20. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she last met the chairman of RJB Mining plc. [19888]

Mr. Battle: As the Minister responsible for energy matters, I have met with the Chairman and Executives of RJB Mining plc on a number of occasions and will continue to do so as I see necessary. I last formally met Mr. Budge on Thursday 11 December. My officials maintain close contact with the company also.

High Technology Companies

21. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to assist high technology companies to expand their businesses. [19890]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are determined to create an environment in which high technology companies can develop and grow. This includes improving the climate for investment, helping firms to access and adapt new technologies, and encouraging partnerships between the science and engineering base and industry. The DTI has already announced a number of new activities in these areas, including, for example:

support for the UK Business Incubator Centre;

setting up a Steering Group on Tech-Stars; and

establishing the enterprise Zone Internet site.

Barclays Bank

22. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received on the current dispute between Barclays bank and its staff; and if she will make a statement. [19891]

28. **Mr. Moran:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received on the current dispute between Barclays bank and its staff. [19898]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department has received a number of representations about this dispute. These have included representations from the Banking Insurance and Finance Union, UN/FI, a member of Barclays bank staff and Members of this House. ACAS stands ready to assist but can only become involved if both sides agrees.

27. **Mr. Coleman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will invite the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to use its conciliation services in the Barclays bank dispute. [19897]

Mr. Ian McCartney: ACAS is an independent body and the Government cannot and should not direct it to act in any particular way. ACAS of course stands ready to assist but can become involved in talks only where both sides agree.

Mr. Khabra: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will request ACAS to invite Barclays Bank and the unions representing Barclays staff to use its conciliation services to help resolve the current dispute; and if she will make a statement. [19799]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 9 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *529*.

Low Pay Commission

23. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the work of the Low Pay Commission. [19892]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Low Pay Commission is well advanced on its programme of consultation to obtain views of employers, employees and other interested organisations and individuals on the National Minimum Wage. The Commission is also undertaking a series of visits throughout the UK to obtain local views. I understand they will visit Wales on 9 January 1998.

Inward Investment

24. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures she is taking to ensure the spread of inward investment benefits throughout England. [19893]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Location decisions for inward investment are a matter for the commercial judgment of each inward investor, but all the agencies in England, as elsewhere in the UK, are active in promoting the particular attractions of their regions. New supply chain opportunities generated by inward investment projects often cut across regional boundaries thus widening the benefits beyond any single region.

Research Organisations

25. **Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures her Department is taking to improve communication between business and research base organisations. [19894]

Mr. Battle: One of the key aims of the Government is to maximise the benefits from our research base, whose excellence is widely recognised.

We have already made a number of announcements since the election demonstrating our commitment in this area, for example the establishment of four new Faraday Partnerships, the extension of TCS (the Teaching Company Scheme) and the Foresight LINK Awards.

The President of the Board of Trade has also instituted the President's Partnership Prize as an accolade to those universities who have achieved high levels of success in applying the results of their research to commercial problems.

I am considering, as part of the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review, what more can be done to improve interaction between business and the science, engineering and technology base.

Industrial Enterprises

26. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total sum spent on the production and development of industrial enterprises in the most recent year for which figures are available. [19896]

Mrs. Roche: A breakdown of RSA grant offered to foreign and domestic enterprises by region is published each year in the Industrial Development Act 1982 Annual Report, a copy of which is available in the library of the House.

Competitiveness

29. **Mrs. Dean:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures she has taken to improve the competitiveness of British companies. [19899]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman).

Liz Blackman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to improve the competitiveness of British industry. [19876]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is pushing forward her Competitiveness UK initiative. On 11 November, she published "A Benchmark for Business", an examination of our competitiveness at both national and sectoral level.

My right hon. Friend has announced the creation of six industry-based Working Parties to advise her on how business and Government can improve UK performance. The work of these groups and of my right hon. Friend's Advisory Group on Competitiveness will lead to a Competitiveness White Paper next year.

31. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures she has taken to improve the competitiveness of small and medium businesses. [19902]

Mrs. Roche: Small firms form the bedrock of a successful enterprise culture. The sector is crucial to the UK's competitiveness and lies at the heart of the Government's economic strategy.

We have already taken a number of steps to stimulate and sustain the competitiveness of small businesses. Measures include raising the quality of business support provided by Business Links to the standard of the best;

launch of the Enterprise Zone as the definitive Internet site for guiding small businesses to the most appropriate authoritative business-related information; and the bringing forward of a package of measures to promote a better payment culture.

We also want future policies and priorities to be informed by business. SMEs are therefore an important element of the process of consultation and dialogue under the Department's "Competitiveness" initiative.

Minimum Wage

30. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations she has received on minimum wage proposals. [19901]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government have received a number of representations on our plans to introduce a national minimum wage.

35. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on exemptions to the national minimum wage. [19906]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We plan to introduce a national minimum wage which does not differentiate by area, sector of employment, size of undertaking or by occupation. The Low Pay Commission has been asked to make recommendations about the possibility of exempting or applying a different rate to those aged under 26.

Carbon Emissions

32. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact of freezing approvals for gas-powered electricity generation plant on achieving the Government's target of 20 per cent. reductions in carbon emissions by 2010. [19903]

Mr. Battle: Any such assessment has to await the outcome of the Kyoto Conference, and detailed proposals for implementation of targets agreed internationally and, of the Review itself.

Trade Contracts

33. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account she takes of environmental aspects when pursuing trade contracts. [19904]

Mrs. Roche: The Department ensures that environmental considerations are take into account in assessing applications from companies for support in pursuing overseas contracts.

Energy (Single Market)

34. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on progress in developing a single market in energy in the European Community. [19905]

Mr. Battle: Directive 96/92 concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity entered into force in February this year and must be implemented by the majority of Member States by February 1999. This Directive requires Member States to introduce competition in electricity generation and allow at least 25 per cent. of their market to seek alternative suppliers of electricity as a first stage, rising to around one third of the market by 2003.

Political agreement was reached at the Energy Council on 8 December on the Gas Liberalisation Directive.

GEC-Alsthom

Mr. Kidney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her Department's role on the flotation of GEC Alsthom. [19884]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: While the flotation of GEC-Alsthom is a matter for the two shareholding companies, we want to see it continue as a successful world player in power generation, power transmission, and rail transportation with a substantial presence in the UK.

Biotechnology

Ms Whalley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has for public consultation in respect of the proposed European Biotechnology Patent Directive. [17804]

Mr. Battle: Information concerning the Commission's proposal was circulated widely, including by use of the Internet. As a result, over 150 organisations made their views known to me or my Department and took part in a consultation exercise. Organisations included those representing environmental interests, health and patient groups, animal welfare, the professions, industry, trade unions and religious groups.

The debate which surrounded the European Commission's proposal for a Directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions highlighted a number of ethical issues which surrounded this technology. Therefore, I announced on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *412*, that my Department would be sponsoring a consultation initiative to seek public views on biological research.

My ultimate goal is to engage members of the public in debate to enable us to assess the issues that are of wider concern. However, I feel that an important pre-cursor to this is to involve interested parties active in the debate to add to the credibility that an inclusive approach will offer.

I shall be hosting an event in the New Year to discuss with groups active in the biosciences and science communication how we can best develop the public activity, which is planned for next summer.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Government plans to respond to the 5th Report of the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1996–97 (HC 373), on the Cloning of Animals from Adult Cells; and if she will make a statement. [22105]

Mrs. Beckett: I welcome the careful consideration which the committee gave the issues raised following the announcement of the successful cloning of "Dolly" from adult sheep cells. The Government's response emphasises that the Government will strive to ensure that the debate on the ethical issues surrounding biosciences keeps pace with advances in these technologies, both at national and

international level. The Government's response has been published today and copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of consents for further gas-fired power stations. [17952]

Mrs. Beckett: It was announced on 3 December that I propose to defer decisions on outstanding applications until the work of the Review announced on that day has been completed.

Defective Products

Sir Richard Body: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what cost analysis has been undertaken on European Council document COM (97) 478 on the approximation of laws for defective products; and what domestic legislation this document will entail. [18477]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: An initial consultation of farming interests by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) suggests that the main costs to agriculture producers will be those associated with insuring against potential product liability claims, and may be fairly low. MAFF will shortly be carrying out a full consultation on the likely costs to the industry.

If adopted, the proposed amendment to the 1985 Product Liability Directive would most likely be implemented in the United Kingdom by regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 amending Part I of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 (which implements the 1985 Directive). The 1985 Directive was implemented in Northern Ireland by the Consumer Protection (Northern Ireland) Order 1987.

Export Credits

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of the *(a)* claims and *(b)* recoveries on ECGD business were attributable to exports and defence related equipment for the financial years (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95, (iv) 1995–96 and (v) 1996–97. [19746]

Mrs. Roche: From readily available information, the following figures have been extracted:

Per cent.

	Claims	*Recoveries*
1992–93	10.97	6.86
1993–94	13.78	2.36
1994–95	31.62	2.68
1995–96	36.41	4.34
1996–97	20.98	1.89

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she has taken to establish the (i) status and (ii) costs of millennium compliance for *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the European Parliament. [19195]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The UK Government take the issue of millennium compliance extremely seriously, which is why at the Telecommunications Council meeting on 1 December I drew attention to the need for analysis and preparation both within the public and private sectors. However, the particular matter raised here is one for the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the number of computer professionals needed to solve the year 2000 computer compliance problem for the SME sector; how many she estimates are currently available; and if she will make a statement. [19262]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The Government have made no estimate. Some industry specialists estimate that between 30,000 to 50,000 additional skilled IT staff will be required. Action 2000, the Government's new initiative to help businesses tackle the century date problem, will be supporting programmes to address this issue.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the cost has been of the enterprise zone system which provides information on the Internet for small firms. [19581]

Mrs. Roche: The cost of developing and launching the first phase of the Enterprise Zone, which went live on 4 November, was £46,000. A maximum budget of £200,000 has been allocated from existing resources for the present financial year to cover the costs of further development, and of maintaining and publicising the site.

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department will publish the results of its consultation on export licences. [20036]

Mrs. Roche: As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade stated on 5 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *236*, copies of the responses to the consultation document on strategic export controls (with the exception of two for which confidentiality was requested), were placed in the libraries of both Houses in February of this year as well as the library of the DTI, where members of the public could arrange to see them. In the same statement, the President of the Board of Trade announced that copies of these responses would henceforth also be available on request from the Department's Export Control Organisation.

We have since been considering the responses carefully as part of the DTI-led review of strategic export controls and expect to set out our proposals during the current parliamentary session.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will provide details of the export licences *(a)* granted since 1988 and *(b)* pending for the export of tear gas and plastic baton rounds to Kenya. [20054]

Mrs. Roche: These goods, and others, are controlled under different entries in Part 1 of Schedule III to the Export of Goods (Control) Order which are known as the ratings for these goods: tear gas under entry ML7; and plastic baton rounds under entries ML3 or PL5018.

The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated, and the following results were obtained.

As of 9 December 1997, 61 standard individual export licences are recorded as having been issued since 1 January 1991 for the export to Kenya of goods with these ratings. Since 1 January 1994, no Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) have been issued for the export to Kenya of such goods.

Number of standard individual export licences covering the export to Kenya of goods with this rating

Rating	*Number*
ML7	0
ML3	49
PL5018	12

However, this information should be considered in light of the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

It would entail disproportionate cost to determine which, if any, of the licences on which data are set out in the table covered the specified goods. Similarly, information on any standard individual export licences and/or OIELs for the export to Kenya of the specified goods that may have been issued before these dates could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In addition, goods with the relevant ratings may have been exported to Kenya under the following Open General Export licences: OGEL (export after repair: military goods) and OGEL (export after exhibition: military goods), both of which were first issued on 1 March 1994.

As of 21 November 1997, two applications for standard individual export licences for the export of Kenya of goods with one or more of the relevant ratings were awaiting a decision and none for Open Individual Export Licences with this coverage.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will provide details of export licences granted to Sound Day Corporation for the export of anti-riot equipment, tear gas canisters and plastic baton rounds to Kenya since 1988. [20055]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated, and the following results were obtained.

As of 12 December 1997, no standard individual export licences are recorded as having been issued to Sound Day Corporation since 1 January 1991; and no Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) have been issued to this company since 1 January 1994.

However, this information should be considered in light of the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

Information on any standard individual export licences and/or OIELs that may have been issued to this company before these dates could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

India Desk

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff there are on her Department's India Desk. [20946]

Mrs. Roche: Currently 13 people are allocated to the India Desk.

Investment

Mr. Swinney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the multilateral agreement on investment. [20704]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The Government support the general aims of the proposed MAI and are working to achieve a successful outcome to the negotiations by next April. We are aiming for a comprehensive, multilateral and legally binding agreement providing high standards of investment protection and liberalisation of investment regimes, based on the principle of non-discrimination against foreign investors, and with effective dispute settlement procedures. This Government have pressed for the MAI to take account of environmental and labour concerns.

Steel Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's forecast of changes in employment levels in the British steel industry over the next year. [20893]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* This is a diverse industry with many companies, the great majority of which do not themselves publish predictions about future employment. In these circumstances, the Government make no such forecast. Indeed, no Government have ever produced forecasts of levels of employment in the private sector.

Post Office

Mr. Laxton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the number of crown post offices, the types and numbers of other main offices, the number of sub post offices, the number of crown offices closed and the number of closed offices converted into each type of

other main office or sub post office in each year since 1989. [21270]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I understand from the Post Office that the numbers are as follows:

Year to end March	Crown offices	Company franchise post offices	Independent franchise post offices	Modified sub post offices	Other sub post offices
1989	1,493	0	0	0	19,537
1990	1,339	0	0	153	19,379
1991	1,167	3	0	315	19,153
1992	1,019	28	0	438	18,675
1993	917	78	0	498	18,465
1994	800	120	0	576	18,286
1995	699	164	0	646	18,098
1996	653	190	0	677	17,894
1997	606	209	25	686	17,725

Toys

Kate Hoey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by what procedures her Department ensures that the grants which they award to small toy producers to exhibit at trade fairs are spent completely in the interests of the recipient by the British Toy and Hobby Association. [21264]

Mrs. Roche: Grants are paid to the British Toy and Hobby Association, and to other intermediaries, on receipt of a signed claim listing the names of the eligible firms in their group and the amounts owing. We seek confirmation from intermediaries' auditors once a year that all their claims are in order and that moneys have been passed on to eligible firms. We also audit a random sample of events to check that intermediaries like the BTHA have discharged all their obligations to the Department.

Telephone Fraud

Mr. Oaten: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints concerning telephone fraud her Department has received in each of the last three years. [20965]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* From readily available records, I can state that my Department received one complaint concerning telephone fraud in 1995, five complaints in 1996 and two complaints in 1997.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will establish a public inquiry into domestic telephone fraud. [20966]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Oftel has over the past year carried out detailed investigations with BT into complaints of organised network fraud on telephone services. Oftel is continuing its investigations but has no evidence of organised network fraud. I am confident that Oftel take network security issues very seriously. My Department therefore has no plans at present to establish a public inquiry into domestic telephone fraud.

Working Time Directive

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by which date she expects to enact the European Working Time Directive. [21387]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We shall implement the Directive without any avoidable delay.

Businesses (Assisted Areas)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many businesses have moved from unassisted to assisted areas in the last three years; and what figures she has collated in respect of the Chorley constituency. [21496]

Mrs. Roche: There are no data available on the number of businesses moving form unassisted to assisted areas.

The Government does, however, publish a wide range of data on financial assistance to companies in assisted areas in the Industrial Development Act 1982 Annual Report. This information is presented to Parliament pursuant to sections 11 and 15 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. Copies of the reports for the last three years are available in the Library of the House.

Opencast Mines

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many open castmines currently operate in the United Kingdom. [21389]

Mr. Battle: At the end of November 1997, there were 84 producing opencast coal sites in the United Kingdom.

Gulf States (Visits)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to visit *(a)* Abu Dhabi, *(b)* Dubai and *(c)* Oman. [21859]

Mrs. Roche: None at present, but the DTI Ministerial overseas visits programme is constantly under review.

Launch Aid

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on Launch Aid. [19889]

Mr. Battle: The Government will continue to assess any application for launch aid on its individual merits. As I said when I announced the Government's investment in Rolls-Royce's Trent engine programme, consideration of future applications for this kind of support for the civil aviation industry will be informed by our commitment to public/private sector partnerships.

The Government currently receive receipts from the aerospace industry from past launch aid of more than £100 million a year. The investment in Rolls-Royce Trent engine programme should, if successful as I fully expect, yield a commercial rate of return to the country.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the Answer to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *163–64*, if she will arrange for the Report on the Guidelines for the Management of Civil Plutonium to be placed on the Department's internet site. [21674]

Mr. Battle: I have arranged for the Guidelines for the Management of Civil Plutonium, as applicable to the UK, to be placed on the Department of Trade and Industry's Internet site at http://www.dti.gov.uk.

Energy Council

Mr. Caplin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Energy Council meeting on 8 December [22083]

Mr. Battle: The Council considered several issues and received reports on matters of interest. I represented the UK.

Council reached political agreement on a draft common position on the gas liberalisation directive. The main elements of the agreement include a requirement for a minimum initial market opening of 20 per cent., increasing to 28 per cent., after five years from entry into force and 33 per cent. after ten years. All gas-fired power generators will, from the beginning, be able to obtain competitive supplies. Initial thresholds for eligible industrial customers were set at 25 million cubic metres (mcm), dropping to 15 mcm after five years and 5 mcm by year ten. Member States were given the option to introduce separate arrangements for the inclusion of industrial combined heat and power producers.

The agreement also includes provision for eligible customers and third party suppliers to have access to gas transportation networks and requires Member States to put in place an independent authority to settle disputes about access. Network companies will be required not to abuse information received from third parties and to publish the main commercial conditions for use of their network. The agreement also contains provisions to provide access to upstream pipelines in a manner which takes account satisfactorily of the particular nature of upstream activity.

The draft common position recognises that market opening could lead to transitional problems for major gas companies and allows Member States, subject to clearance by the Commission, to agree to the possibility of their companies refusing network access where competition leads to serious financial difficulties in respect of long term take or pay contracts. Transitional arrangements will also be available to countries or areas of countries without a developed gas supply infrastructure (the latter subject to Commission authorisation) where the immediate implementation of the directive would create difficulties concerning the promotion of investment in gas networks.

The Government welcome the agreement reached as a first step in opening the EU market for natural gas. Liberalisation will boost EU competitiveness and bring the UK new opportunities for trade, investment and employment. The draft common position is compatible with the existing competitive arrangements in the UK market. The proposal will be submitted to the European Parliament for consideration during the UK Presidency once a formal common position has been adopted.

The Council received a presentation from the Commission on a White Paper and Action Plan on a strategy for the future of renewable sources of energy and a reached common position on a Council decision concerning a multinational programme for the promotion of renewable energy sources in the Community—ALTENER II. A two year programme with a budget of 22 mecu was agreed. I gave my full support to the ALTENER II programme which I regard as an important element in the Commission's proposals to increase the use of renewable energy sources.

Council approved a resolution on combined heat and power. The resolution welcomed the publication of a Community strategy to promote CHP recognising its positive contribution to environmental policies particularly towards the target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and invited the Commission to continue its work.

Council approved a proposal to extend the SYNERGY programme aimed at the promotion of international cooperation in the energy field. A one year extension with a budget of 5 mecu was agreed subject to formal receipt of the European Parliaments opinion.

In addition, the Council received presentations from the Commission on its proposal for a Council decision for a multiannual energy framework programme for actions in the energy sector, and a progress report on the Energy Charter Treaty.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) if he will list those companies invited to tender for licensing rights for the Millennium Exhibition indicating which companies submitted tenders; and which companies submitted tenders uninvited; [20695]

(2) when he expects to announce the appointment of a company to market the licensing rights of the Millennium Exhibition; [20694]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the invitation to tender for licensing rights for the Millennium Exhibition; [20667]

(4) how many companies were invited to tender for licensing rights for the Millennium Exhibition; by what date tenders had to be submitted; and how many companies tendered; [20693]

(5) in which publications in the EU the invitation to tender for licensing rights for the Millennium Exhibition was advertised. [20668]

Mr. Mandelson: On 17 July 1997 the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) advertised in the Official Journal of European Communities (OJEC) for expressions of interest from companies to manage the licensing of merchandise for the Millennium Experience. The NMEC contacted ten companies drawing their attention to the

OJEC advertisement. Those wishing to be considered for invitations to tender were required to submit standard corporate documentation by 29 July. Four expressions of interest were received—two from companies whom NMEC had contacted and two from companies not contacted directly by NMEC. In 12 August NMEC invited all four to tender, seeking written submissions by 26 August. Two companies submitted full bids.

Subsequently the NMEC has reviewed the option of conducting licensing through in house resources. The NMEC expects to take a final decision shortly on the preferred approach. In the meantime, I have placed in the libraries of the House copies of the OJEC advertisement and copies of the NMEC's Invitation to Tender.

It is not normal business practice to reveal the names of companies who bid for, but who are not awarded, contracts. To do so runs the risk of damaging their competitive position in their particular markets. It is also the case that European Union regulations stipulate only that the name of the winner of contracts be announced. Nevertheless, for the future, I can confirm that at the initial stages of competitive tendering exercises, the NMEC will ask companies to indicate whether or not they are content for their names to be revealed.

Overseas Visits

Jacqui Smith: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will list the overseas visits he has made, indicating the date and purpose of the visit in each case. [21580]

Mr. Mandelson: I have visited:

Paris from 17–18 July, for discussions with ministerial counterparts and others, and to speak at a seminar arranged by the British Council;

Germany from 11–13 September, for discussions with ministerial counterparts and others in Bonn, and to attend the Club of Three meeting in Munich;

Rome from 9–10 October, for discussions with ministerial counterparts and others, and to deliver a lecture at the Institute of International affairs; and

France from 27–28 November, for discussions with ministerial counterparts and others in Paris, and to visit Futuroscope in Poitiers in my capacity as minister responsible for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich.

My discussions have concentrated largely on EU-related issues of mutual interest.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Access to Information

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his oral answer of 11 December 1997, Official Report, column 1193, on access to information concerning grants to farmers and landowners, if access to the nature and the amounts of grant or subsidy will be included. [21249]

Dr. David Clark: All such information held by the public authorities concerned would be within the scope of the proposed Freedom of Information Act set out in the White Paper "Your Right to Know". Whether the information could be disclosed in particular cases would depend on whether it passes the substantial harm and public interest tests integral to the Act's access provisions.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies who had not provided him with a completed, fully costed and prioritised plan for dealing with their millennium computer compliance problems by *(a)* 1 November and *(b)* 1 December. [21553]

Dr. David Clark: Plans were sought from central Government Departments and agencies, and all had responded by the time I made my statement on 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *1104–05*.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what problems to date have been encountered across government as a consequence of the millennium computer compliance problem; and if he will make a statement. [21551]

Dr. David Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the assessment in the statement I made to the House on 27 November. I have also written to departments asking for further information on three particularly important issues: the need to ensure that plans are not impeded by the possibility of skill shortages; the need to look at embedded chips in timing and other control devices; and, ensuring contingency plans are in place.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the areas of the public sector for which he has responsibility for assessing and guiding the progress towards computer millennium compliance; and if he will make a statement. [21547]

Dr. David Clark: I am responsible for co-ordinating activity by central government departments and agencies. These are the 137 organisations listed in the Year 2000 plans which I placed in the Libraries of the House and published on the Internet following my statement to the House on 27 November.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if millennium computer compliance problems in the public sector will be triggered on the date 9 September 1999; and if he will make a statement. [21552]

Dr. David Clark: The comprehensive guidance by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency to departments and agencies explained that dates other than 1 January 2000 might affect systems. Departments and agencies are thus aware that their systems audits must take this into account.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his oral statement on Computers and the Century Date Change of 27 November, *Official Report*, column 1104, what margin of error is attached to the £370 million total cost estimated; and if this figure includes expenditure on resolving the embedded chip problem in all Government Departments. [21548]

Dr. David Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made to the House on 27 November. I indicated that I would be monitoring progress being made by departments and agencies. That will include any amendments to their cost estimates.

I also wrote on that day to colleagues about a number of follow-up issues, including the need to ensure that all plans properly addressed the embedded chip issue.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the dates in 1998 on which he intends to make his quarterly statement updating progress in dealing with the millennium computer compliance problem in the public sector; and if he will make a statement. [21550]

Dr. David Clark: I intend to report progress in dealing with the millennium computer compliance problem in Government Departments and agencies to the House on a quarterly basis, starting in spring 1998.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy on the final date by which millennium computer compliance across the public sector should be completed; and if he will make a statement. [21546]

Dr. David Clark: I would refer the hon. Member of the statement I made to the House on 27 November. The guidance to departments and agencies makes clear that account should be taken of dates other than 1 January 2000 which might affect systems.

Information Technology

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the total annual expenditure on information technology systems across *(a)* central Government and *(b)* the rest of the public sector; and if he will make a statement. [21549]

Dr. David Clark: The latest estimate I have of IT spend for central Government is approximately £2.5 billion per annum. The figure for the rest of the public sector is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Pensions

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans her Department has to ensure that all local authorities introduce full disregard of war pensions in respect of council tax; and if she will make a statement. [13148]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The disregard of War Pensions by local authorities applies to Housing Benefit as well as Council Tax Benefit. We are reviewing Housing Policy, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions as part of the modernisation of social security. All aspects of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are open to review, including disregards.

Carers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the number of people who act as carers for others; and what is her estimate of the numbers in each of the next three years. [20673]

Mr. Denham: The 1990 General Household Survey indicates that around 6.8 million people in Great Britain provide some care informally for elderly or disabled relatives or friends. No assessment has been made of future numbers.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in each local authority area register will be receiving council tax benefit if each local authority raises its expenditure to the provisional capping limit announced in the local government settlement on 2 December. [20565]

Mr. Field *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The average number of Council Tax Benefit claimants would be approximately 35,000 higher in England, if each English local authority raised its expenditure to the provisional capping limit announced in the local government settlement on 2 December.

Notes:

1. The figure is rounded to the nearest 5,000.

2. Modelled using 1995–96 Family Resources Survey data uprated to 1997–98 prices, benefit and earnings levels, and provisional 1998–99 Council tax levels.

Retirement (Women)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the percentage of women retiring in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 2015, *(c)* 2035 and *(d)* 2045 who will be entitled to a full category A retirement pension. [20808]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

The pensions review is one of the Government's key priorities. As part of the review we will be looking at ways to narrow the pensions gap between men and women so as to give women more security in retirement. We are also seeking to raise awareness of pensions issues.

As at September 1997, of women who are aged 60 within the previous year and are in receipt of any Retirement Pension, 15 per cent. are in receipt of a full Category A Retirement Pension. Projections in the same form for future years are not available.

Assumed percentage of women at minimum pension age who have own entitlement to retirement pensions and the average rate of entitlement as a percentage of the standard rate

Per cent.

Financial year of reaching pension age	*Assumed percentage with own entitlement*	*Average rate of benefit*
2000–01	80	75
2005–06	90	78
2000–11	100	83
2015–16	100	88
2020–21	100	91

Note:

Figures in table are from the report of the National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial Estimates by GAD on the 3rd Quinquennial Review under Section 137 of the Social Security Act 1995.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *533*, on invalidity benefit, what estimate she has made of the amounts and the proportion of the savings in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 on invalidity benefit which have been made in each Welsh benefit district. [21095]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested as it is not possible to estimate accurately the proportion of the savings accruing from the introduction of Incapacity Benefit in each Welsh benefit district.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated saving in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 from the introduction of incapacity benefit. [21576]

Mr. Denham: The estimated savings from the introduction of Incapacity Benefit are in the table.

Year	*Savings*[1] *(£ million)*
1997–98	1,350
1998–99	1,830
1999–2000	2,190

[1] Cash terms.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the growth in expenditure on disability benefits since 1979 is attributable to recipients who are *(a)* above pension age, *(b)* within five years of pension age and *(c)* children. [21522]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information that is available on caseloads for Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance in 1979 and Disability Living Allowance for 1997 is given in the tables below. These benefits provide help to disabled people with the extra costs incurred because of the effects of their disabilities. Expenditure on these benefits has increased in real terms by 926 per cent. from 1978–79 to 1996–97.

People in receipt of attendance allowance at 31 December 1979

000

	Higher	*Lower*	*All*
Men			
All ages	49	69	118
Under 16	11	16	27
60–64	4	5	9
65 and over	20	25	45
Women			
All ages	74	94	168
Under 16	8	16	24
60–64	5	6	11
65 and over	49	59	108
All persons			
All ages	123	163	286
Under 16	19	32	51
60–64	—	—	—
65 and over	—	—	—

Source:

Estimated from a 100 per cent. count of statistical records, adjusted to reflect the extent to which they overstate the number of live cases.

Note:

1. Attendance allowance extended to children under two years of age in 1990.

People in receipt of mobility allowance at 31 December 1979

000

	Men	*Women*	*All*
Mobility allowance	56	57	113
All ages	—	—	16
Under 15	—	—	9
60 and over	—	—	—
Vehicle scheme	—	—	24
All ages	—	—	—
Under 15	—	—	—
60 and over	—	—	—

Source:

100 per cent. data.

People in receipt of attendance allowance at 31 August 1997 age 65 and over

000

	Higher	*Lower*	*All*
Men	158	179	337
Women	347	515	862
All persons	505	694	1,199

Source:

5 per cent. data.

People in receipt of disability living allowance at 31 August 1997

000

	Care component			*Mobility component*		
	Higher	*Middle*	*Lower*	*Higher*	*Lower*	*All awards*
Men						
All ages	180	282	190	651	206	980
Under 16	43	59	10	27	39	118
55–59	17	25	28	91	13	112
60–64	21	31	35	124	13	146
65 and over	26	38	26	176	10	194
Women						
All ages	183	263	216	657	173	944
Under 16	27	38	7	18	21	75
55–59	21	27	35	95	15	121
60–64	24	32	36	116	13	139
65 and over	30	43	31	176	11	197
All persons						
All ages	363	545	407	1,307	379	1,924
Under 16	71	98	17	45	59	192
55–59	38	52	63	185	48	233
60–64	45	62	71	239	26	285
65 and over	56	81	57	353	21	391

Source:

5 per cent. data.

Note:

1. Disability living allowance introduced in 1992 which replaced and extended help available through mobility allowance and attendance allowance for those under 65.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what millennium compliance problems have occurred to date in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* other public bodies; and if she will make a statement. [21558]

Mr. Field: The Department has been aware of the potential impact of the Year 2000 for some considerable time and an analysis of our major systems was carried out in 1996. This analysis confirmed that DSS' major systems, for example the Income Support and Retirement Pension computer systems, would only require minor attention. This is because these systems store dates in a way that is unaffected by the year 2000. Prior to completion of the analysis, some systems using forward dates experienced minor problems which were rectified at the time.

The Department is also working with all our third party suppliers to identify products and interfaces that may need remedial action.

The DSS Year 2000 Project was established in July 1996. This project is co-ordinating extensive activity across DSS, and it is working within the Central Communications and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) approved guidelines for managing IT Projects. We are members of the CCTA Year 2000 Public Sector Group and use this forum to identify common issues and their solutions.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if her Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem include costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if she will make a statement. [21559]

Mr. Field: Yes.

Hardship Payments

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants who have had benefits sanctions imposed for failure to attend or complete work placements under project work have applied for hardship payments; and how many of those have been successful. [21518]

Mr. Field: The information is not available in the format requested.

The number of jobseekers who applied for hardship payments in the period October 1996 to November 1997 was 77,000. The number of hardship awards made for the same period was 70,000. A breakdown of hardship awards made by reasons for sanction is not available.

HEALTH

GP Fundholding (North Essex)

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the North Essex Health Authority finance allocated to GP fundholders was spent in other health authority areas; and how much of that was spent in the private sector and on which specialties in the last year for which figures are available. [18611]

Mr. Milburn: Information is not held centrally on how much of their budget general practitioner fundholders in North Essex Health Authority spent in other health authority areas.

Neither do health authority accounts identify GP fundholder expenditure in private providers of healthcare, except in aggregate with that in voluntary providers such as hospices and in general practices approved to provide secondary care.

Dental Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each health authority area were removed from NHS dentists' registers because they missed a registration period in each year since 1990. [19655]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested for 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 has been placed in the Library. The two year registration period for adults was first introduced in October 1990 and so no registrations could have lapsed until 1992–93.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people in each health authority area who have not made a dental appointment in the last 15 months. [19656]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *423*.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of community health councils within the framework set out in his NHS White Paper. [20699]

Mr. Milburn: Community Health Councils have an important role in representing their local population's views in the health service and in providing information and advice to the public.

Carbon Monoxide

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours training on *(a)* toxicology and *(b)* the effects of carbon monoxide is given to medical students; and if he will request the GMC to review its requirements. [20724]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not held centrally. Individual university medical schools determine their own undergraduate medical curricula in the light of recommendations from the Education Committee of the General Medical Council, which has a statutory responsibility to determine the extent of the knowledge and skill required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the United Kingdom. We will ensure that the GMC is made aware of your concern about this matter.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the health effects of long-term exposure to carbon monoxide. [20725]

Ms Jowell: We have recently announced the funding of a £1 million joint research programme over 3 years with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions into the effects on health of exposure to air pollutants and damp in the home. The successful research proposals will be announced shortly and include 3 projects on carbon monoxide. We will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) towards the end of January with more details.

In addition we are funding a major research initiative on outdoor air pollution with the Medical Research Council and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. This programme of research began in 1994–95 and is due for completion in 1998–99. Three of the projects funded under this initiative are looking at carbon monoxide alongside other pollutants. However, none are primarily focused on the long term health effects of exposure to carbon monoxide. When the research programme is completed an evaluation of the effectiveness of the research will be made in order to assess where further research is needed.

Young People in Care

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time that young people are remanded in the care of the local authority by courts. [20692]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

During the year ending 31 March 1996, the latest for which figures are available, young people spent an average of approximately 10 weeks on remand, or committed for trial or sentence, in the care of local authorities in England.

Eye Examinations

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals underwent a routine bi-annual eye examination in *(a)* each of the three years before 1989 and *(b)* each of the three years after 1989; and if he will make a statement. [21223]

Mr. Milburn: This information requested is not available since statistics collected on National Health Service sight tests do not show the name of the individual tested and no information was collected on private sight tests until 1993–94.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of young people *(a)* under the age of 16 years and *(b)* aged between 16 and 19 years who are in full-time education take advantage of the bi-annual eye test to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement; [21222]

(2) what proportion of those people whose income is just above social security benefit levels as defined by a means test take advantage of the bi-annual eye test to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement; [21220]

(4) what proportion of recipients of jobseeker's allowance take advantage of the recommended and free bi-annual eye test to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement; [21224]

(5) what proportion of those people in receipt of disability working allowance take advantage of the bi-annual eye test to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement; [21219]

(5) what proportion of people on income support or family credit take advantage of the bi-annual eye test to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement. [21221]

Mr. Milburn: Information is not held centrally in the form requested because statistics collected on sight tests do not show the name of the individual tested. The table shows the aggregate number of National Health Service sight tests received by each eligible group with an estimate of the total population of this group. Information is not yet available on income based job seekers allowance as this benefit was only introduced from 26 October 1996.

Eligible group	*Number of NHS sight tests 1996–97*	*Estimated population of eligible group*
Disability Working Allowance	[1]31,920	9,400
People entitled to help through NHS low income scheme and partners	331,130	550,000
Income Support/Family Credit	2,231,650	6,330,000
Children under 16	2,353,700	10,060,000
Students 16–18	515,320	1,030,000

[1] Subject to verification.

Midwives

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what comparative studies his Department has made of the cost effectiveness of recruiting midwives from overseas compared with employing midwives currently on the register in the United Kingdom but not practising. [21035]

Mr. Milburn: We are not aware that the Department has carried out studies of this kind.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts and health authorities have implemented the NHS Executive recommendation for a minimum F Grade for midwives; and if he will list them. [21034]

Mr. Milburn: Information on midwives' grading is not available centrally, but examples of developments following EL(95)77 are quoted in the Written Evidence from the Health Departments for Great Britain to the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, Review for 1998. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the setting up of health action zones includes provision for developing woman-centred midwifery care as set out in the guidelines of "Changing Childbirth". [21245]

Mr. Milburn: One of the key objectives for health action zones is developing improved, responsive services that are sensitive to local needs. The Government expect health action zones to do this within the framework of national policy, and where proposals include maternity services they should be developed within the principles of responsive woman-centred care.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the measures announced by the Government to tackle violence, discrimination and stress in the NHS will address the particular problems and risks encountered by midwives in the community. [21247]

Mr. Milburn: The measures we are taking to tackle violence, discrimination and stress in the National Health Service apply equally to all staff including those who work in the community. We have also recently authorised work by the Royal College of Nursing and the NHS Executive with a view to issuing, by the middle of next year, good practice guidance specifically on violence to staff working in the community.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the arrangements for the funding and allocation of study leave for the continuing professional development of midwives. [21246]

Mr. Milburn: The arrangements for the funding and allocation of study leave for the continuing professional development of midwives are matters for local National Health Service employers in collaboration with education consortia.

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to encourage pharmaceutical companies to apply for a Home Office licence to research and trial cannabis and cannabis derivatives for medical use. [21108]

Mr. Boateng: It is Government policy to support well founded medical research. It is for the pharmaceutical industry to make such applications for research in this area as it sees fit. The issuing of licences is a matter for the Home Office and officials have indicated that they are willing to meet pharmaceutical companies to sort out any problems in this regard.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will meet representatives of the BMA to discuss its reports on the therapeutic uses of cannabis. [21107]

Mr. Boateng: We have no plans to meet the British Medical Association. However, Department of Health officials will meet representatives of the BMA in the new year to discuss its report on the therapeutic uses of cannabis.

Health Service Staff (Incomes)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking in conjunction with the Revenue authorities to monitor the amount of income NHS employees receive from non-NHS sources. [21020]

Mr. Milburn: The Department has in the past commissioned the Inland Revenue to carry out surveys into the earnings of hospital doctors in Great Britain. Surveys were carried out in 1984–85, 1986–87, 1988–89 and 1991–92. The latest of these surveys covers the financial year 1993–94. Consideration is currently being given to future requirements.

Consultants (Private Work)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what methods his Department uses to monitor the level of private work undertaken by NHS consultants; [21019]

(2) what action he is taking to encourage consultants who draw a full NHS salary to limit the amount of private work which they undertake. [21248]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service consultants are required to devote substantially the whole of their professional time to their NHS duties. Whole-time NHS consultants are permitted to have private practice earnings of up to a maximum of 10 per cent. of their gross NHS salary. Employers where necessary, may ask a consultant to produce fully-audited accounts as a means of certification of the level of private practice work.

EU Working Time Directive

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the articles of the European working time directive from which the National Health Service will be exempted. [21386]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service as a whole is not exempt from the scope of the Working Time Directive, but doctors in training are exempt by virtue of Article 1.

Care Homes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* local authority and *(b)* private sector care homes there are in each of the London borough council areas. [21383]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the number of local authority and independent sector (private or voluntary) residential care homes and independent nursing care homes in each local authority area is contained in table L1 of Statistical Bulletin "Community Care Statistics 1997 Residential personal social services for adults, England" (Ref. 1997/26 ISBN 1 85839 812 6) which was published earlier this month. Copies are available in the Library.

Infertility Services

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to redress inequalities in access to infertility services. [21594]

Ms Jowell: The White Paper "The New NHS" outlines a number of steps which the Government will be taking to improve the consistency of service provision throughout the National Health Service. We will challenge and address variations not based on the health needs and wishes of local people. We will aim for maximum consistency while still allowing appropriate local and individual responsiveness.

NHS Trust Boards

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trust boards in the north-west hold their meetings in private. [21683]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote on 30 July to the chairmen of all National Health Service trusts asking them to ensure that board meetings are open to the public. With the agreement of Parliament, regulations will be confirmed early in the new year making open trust board meetings a statutory requirement. The use of closed sessions will be limited to areas where real harm to individuals or to the operation of the trust would result from an open meeting. Information is not held centrally on the extent to which trusts currently hold meetings in private.

Health Service Staff

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected shortfall for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 for (i) hospital doctors, (ii) general practitioners and (iii) nurses. [21359]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the major acute PFI schemes prioritised by his Department since May, how much each relevant health trust paid for each of the last three years in annual capital charges to the Treasury. [21402]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service trusts do not pay capital charges to Her Majesty's Treasury. However, they do repay the interest on their interest bearing debt and may be required to pay a dividend on their Public Dividend Capital. The amounts of interest and dividends repaid for the last three years for each trust is shown in the table.

Major acute NHS private finance initiative scheme prioritisation
Schemes selected to proceed

£000

NHS Trust	*1994–95 total interest and dividends*	*1995–96 total interest and dividends*	*1996–97 total interest and dividends*
Bishop Auckland Hospitals	1,062	691	668
Bromley Hospitals	3,329	3,372	3,874
Calderdale Healthcare	1,984	1,925	1,906
Carlisle Hospitals	1,559	1,072	1,145
Dartford and Gravesham	3,310	3,012	3,347
Greenwich Healthcare	3,199	3,536	3,506
Hereford Hospitals	1,275	1,232	1,324
Norfolk and Norwich Health Care	3,471	729	792
North Durham Acute Hospitals	1,711	1,064	1,808
South Buckinghamshire	3,544	3,599	3,970
South Manchester University Hospitals	4,341	3,449	3,982
South Tees Acute Hospitals	4,166	4,189	4,931
Swindon and Marlborough	1,505	1,578	2,067
Wellhouse	4,462	5,228	6,350
Worcester Royal Infirmary	1,551	1,837	2,099

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was, for each of the 15 major acute PFI schemes prioritised by his Department since May, the actual and percentage charge in purchasers' annual revenue commitment to the schemes between outline and full business case. [21414]

Mr. Milburn: Commissioners do not make an annual revenue commitment to schemes at either the outline or full business case stage.

As part of the business planning process for both publicly and privately funded schemes health authorities are required to confirm that the proposals are affordable within the wider context of their plans for healthcare provision. It is the responsibility of the National Health Service trust to ensure that the revenue commitments implied by a scheme can be met from the resources available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of staffed acute beds at NHS trusts with PFI developments prioritised by his Department since May *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* projected upon completion of the scheme; and what is the percentage charge between the two in each case. [21415]

Mr. Milburn: Figures are provided in the table for the 15 prioritised schemes:

the current number of staffed beds;

the number of staffed beds required following the strategic investment appraisal conducted for the Outline Business Case (OBC); these are the number of beds which would have to be provided in a new hospital using public sector funding;

the number of staffed beds projected to be provided in a new hospital under the PFI solution.

Trust	*Total number of NHS beds at present*	*Total number of NHS beds proposed under public sector route in OBC)*	*Total number of NHS beds provided by PFI solution*
Norfolk and Norwich	964	701	809
South Buckinghamshire	577	537	535
Calderdale	784	594	573
South Manchester	1,248	881	881
Wellhouse	[1]406	406	[2]406
Dartford and Gravesham	451	400	400
Worcester	563	390	390
Bromley	619	525	507
Swindon and Marlborough	622	516	516
North Durham	[3]588	565	454
Carlisle	508	474	474
Hereford	414	340	340
Bishop Auckland	375	[4]223	341
Greenwich	575	621	565
South Tees	1,051	[5]955	980
Total	9,745	8,128	8,171

[1] 520 beds before the (publicly funded) Phase 1a of the redevelopment was completed.
[2] Including phase 1a.
[3] Until 1 August 1997 when closure of Shotley Bridge Hospital will mean 527.
[4] Excludes beds that are to be retained at Bishop Auckland under the PFI option.
[5] 978 in OBC but adjusted down to 955 following further review of service activity.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the major acute PFI schemes prioritised by his Department since May *(a)* the cost of renovating the existing facilities and *(b)* the current estimated cost of the PFI scheme. [21399]

Mr. Milburn: Reliable estimates of the cost for renovating existing facilities are not available.

When the trusts which have had their Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes prioritised since May initially identified a case for change, as part of the outline business case supporting this, they produced a list of options. Following procedures set out in the National Health Service Capital Investment Manual for all NHS capital projects, these will have ranged from do minimum to extensive rebuilding. Renovation would have been the basis of one or more of the options considered but may have been combined with other actions such as improved maintenance, replacement of temporary buildings or partial new builds.

Reliable estimated capital values of the PFI schemes are only available where the full business case has been given approval. A list of the capital values for these schemes is given in the table.

Capital value of the PFI option

	£ million
Norfolk and Norwich NHS Trust	194
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	115
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	38
Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust	87
Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	77

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each lead consortium in each of the major acute PFI schemes prioritised by his Department since May will receive for the use of the new hospitals per year upon completion. [21401]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 15 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *59–60* for details of the unitary payments at the schemes at Dartford and Gravesham National Health Service Trust and Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust.

Since making that reply we are also pleased to announce that the scheme at South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust reached financial close on 16 December.

The estimated unitary payments for South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust are set out in the table.

Estimated annual unitary payment

	South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust £ million
1998–99	3.7
1999–2000	5.0
2000–01	8.2
2001–02	8.2
2002–03	8.2
2003–04	8.2
2004–05	8.2
2005–06	8.5
2006–07	8.5
2007–08	8.5
2008–09	8.5
2009–10	8.5
2010–11	8.5
2011–12	8.5
2012–13	8.5
2013–14	8.5
2014–15	8.5
2015–16	8.9
2016–17	8.4
2017–18	8.4
2018–19	8.4
2019–20	8.4
2020–21	8.4
2021–22	8.2
2022–23	8.2
2023–24	8.2
2024–25	8.2
2025–26	8.2
2026–27	6.0
2027–28	6.0
2028–29	6.0
Total unitary payments	244.6

1. Figures in 1997 prices and are subject to indexation.
2. Figures assume that the schemes become operational during 1999–2000, with the delivery of facilities management services beginning in 1998.
3. The figures assume full availability and performance standards are met throughout.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate by scheme the subsidies paid by his Department under the smoothing mechanism to the 15 major acute PFI schemes prioritised by his Department since May. [21413]

Mr. Milburn: No money has been paid under the smoothing mechanism to the 15 prioritised major acute Private Finance Initiative schemes. National Health Service trusts will not receive money from the smoothing mechanism until the PFI hospital becomes operational.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the recent report by Professor Mike Smith of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, on the issue of the millennium problem in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [21528]

Mr. Milburn: There is no justification for the assumptions on which the statement that up to 1,500 deaths will be caused directly by the Millennium problem was made. In many cases the basis of the figures used is unclear, and in others the figures are out of date.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monies will be made available to the NHS from the contingency reserve to ensure millennium computer compliance; and if he will make a statement. [21523]

Mr. Milburn: None is planned.

At the present time it is assumed that Year 2000 activities throughout the National Health Service will be financed from existing budgets.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what millennium computer compliance problems have arisen to date within *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS, and if he will make a statement. [21529]

Mr. Milburn: In the Department of Health the only problem in operational systems has arisen in electronic diary systems.

The only problems so far identified in the National Health Service have been in Patient Administration Systems, appointment booking and recall modules, where appointments are being made for dates after 31 December 1999. This problem has been addressed by making such appointments manually.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of resolving the embedded chip problem in the NHS; what proportion of the NHS information technology systems budget he estimates this will represent; and if he will make a statement; [21524]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of ensuring millennium computer compliance; and if he will make a statement. [21525]

Mr. Milburn: No estimates have yet been made.

Information should become available after 31 March 1998 when each separate National Health Service Organisation will have completed detailed project plans, detailed inventory and budget estimates.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what risks to NHS patients will arise from *(a)* the millennium computer compliance problem and *(b)* the embedded chip problem; what steps he will take to ensure the safety of patients; and if he will make a statement. [21526]

Mr. Milburn: Because of the nature of its work, many failures of computer-based equipment in the National Health Service are potentially life threatening and contingency plans are in place to cope with such problems. The NHS Executive's Year 2000 Programme is working to eliminate risk through the identification and management of potential risks.

The millennium problem is an example of such a potential failure with the advantage that the problem is well known, clearly defined and with a long lead time. It is a priority for NHS Organisations to develop contingency plans. As such, the risk to patient safety is likely to be minimal.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a model working plan for NHS trusts for dealing with the millennium problem and embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21527]

Mr. Milburn: Good practice guidance was issued to the National Health Service in October 1997 which identified the management actions needed to address the problem. More detailed guidance will be released to all NHS Year 2000 project managers by the end of December 1997.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20533]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* All new contracts for the supply of goods and services to the Department and its Agencies will include a clause requiring the supplier to be millennium compliant or to provide goods that are millennium compliant. The Department will not enter into new contracts without this assurance.

Where millennium compliance is necessary, the relevant existing suppliers have been asked to insert a new clause into their contracts with the Department, or to provide an assurance, that they, or the goods they supply, are millennium compliant. The Department will cease to deal at the appropriate time with existing suppliers who cannot provide this assurance.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 December 1997

TREASURY

Ecclesiastical Buildings

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reduce the rate of VAT payable on the maintenance cost of churches and cathedrals which are listed as being of important historical and architectural significance. [21002]

Dawn Primarolo: No.

Bingo Duty

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from how many establishments bingo duty was collected in the last year for which figures are available. [20493]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* HM Customs and Excise do not collect statistics on the number of establishments paying bingo duty.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much bingo duty the Treasury received in each of the last 10 years; [20491]

(2) what proportion of the revenue received from taxes and duties on gaming, gambling and lotteries consisted of bingo duty in each of the last 10 years. [20492]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The information requested is contained in the table.

	Bingo duty (£ million)	*Total betting and gaming duties (£ million)*	*Bingo duty as a percentage of total duty*
1987–88	61.0	855.0	7.1
1988–89	63.3	913.2	6.9
1989–90	65.9	976.0	6.8
1990–91	67.4	1,006.4	6.7
1991–92	74.7	1,052.8	7.1
1992–93	79.1	1,025.4	7.7
1993–94	77.9	1,105.8	7.0
1994–95	84.4	1,216.9	6.9
1995–96	90.7	1,573.3	5.8
1996–97	95.8	1,441.0	6.6

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information is contained in the Commissioners of Customs and Excise's bingo duty returns on the total number of people playing bingo each week. [20494]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The bingo duty returns made to Customs and Excise do not require any information on the number of people playing bingo.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for East Yorkshire of 26 November concerning inheritance tax reliefs for small businesses and farms. [20711]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* I have sent the hon. Member a reply to this letter today.

Tax Returns

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend the deadline for the submission of self assessment tax returns; and if he will make a statement. [20712]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The statutory filing date for the first self assessment tax returns is 31 January 1998. There are no plans to extend this date.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in each of the last 10 financial years, how many people filled in income tax returns; and of those how many were *(a)* primarily self-employed and *(b)* pensioners. [20993]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Information is not available in the form requested. The total number of returns issued to individuals in the main April issue for each year since 1994, and the number of these issued to people whose main source of income was from self-employment, rent or investment income, was as follows:

Millions

	Total	*of which, main source self-employment, rent or investment income*
April 1994	8.05	4.10
April 1995	7.42	4.15
April 1996	7.61	4.25
April 1997	7.00	4.19

The criteria used to determine the issue of tax returns do not include whether or not an individual is a pensioner, and the numbers of pensioners issued with tax returns is not available.

Duty Free Sector

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *559*, if he will commission research to establish *(a)* the number of jobs in the United Kingdom directly related to the duty free sector and *(b)* the value of United Kingdom spirit sales in the duty free sector in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) the rest of the EU. [21295]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* I have no plans to commission research into any of the areas mentioned.

Capital Gains and Inheritance Taxes

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of revenue raised from *(a)* capital

gains tax and *(b)* inheritance tax in each of the last 10 financial years; and what has been the estimated cost to the Inland Revenue of collecting it. [21329]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* Following is the information requested:

£ Million

	Capital gains tax		Inheritance tax	
	Net receipts[1]	Cost of collection[2, 3]	Net receipts[4]	Cost of collection[3, 5]
1987–88	1,379	25.1	1,078	25.7
1988–89	2,323	26.6	1,071	23.2
1989–90	1,854	34.3	1,232	25.1
1990–91	1,852	39.0	1,262	28.0
1991–92	1,140	43.3	1,299	26.9
1992–93	982	38.4	1,211	26.2
1993–94	710	41.9	1,333	25.3
1994–95	926	33.5	1,411	36.4
1995–96	796	32.6	1,518	37.9
1996–97	1,131	30.3	1,558	31.9

[1] Excludes tax on gains of companies which are charged to corporation tax.

[2] Relates mainly to the costs arising from gains to individuals and trustees, but some other costs (mainly of land valuations for companies) cannot be separately identified and are included in the collection costs of capital gains tax.

[3] The basis for compiling collection costs changed from 1989–90. Direct comparison of these and later figures with those of earlier years may be misleading.

[4] Includes capital transfer tax and estate duty.

[5] Includes the cost of work done by the Shares Valuation Division of the Capital Taxes Office for other Inland Revenue purposes.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the date at which the PAYE computer system at the Inland Revenue will become millennium computer compliant; and if he will make a statement. [21554]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The work needed to make the Inland Revenue's PAYE computer systems Year 2000 compliant will be completed in three phases by April 1999. The majority of the work lies in the first two phases which will be delivered in April and October 1998.

PRIME MINISTER

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many public appointments he has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16788]

The Prime Minister: I have made 14 new public appointments since 1 May to bodies listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies"; 64 per cent. receive remuneration. Owing to the small numbers involved the information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all Departments in an aggregated form.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and whether they receive remuneration. [19979]

The Prime Minister: I have made the following new public appointments to bodies listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies" since 1 May:

Museums and Galleries Commission
Councillor Rosemary Butler

Mr. Ian McKenzie Smith

National Heritage Memorial Fund
Ms Mary Ann Sieghart

Security Vetting Appeals Panel
Sir Anthony May

Dame Janet Smith

Sir John Blelloch[1]

Sir Peter Woodhead[1]

Dr. George Gray[1]

Mr. Peter Jones[1]

Committee on Standards in Public Life
Sir Patrick Neill[1]

Lord Goodhart[1]

The right hon. John MacGregor MP[1]

Sir Anthony Cleaver[1]

Mrs. Frances Heaton[1]

[1]Receive remuneration.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will initiate proposals for a quarterly meeting with *(a)* the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality and *(b)* other organisations representing the Black and Asian Community. [21869]

The Prime Minister: The Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality has met my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on a number of occasions. Leading members of ethnic minority communities have met my right hon. Friend and other Home Office Ministers and Ministers of other Departments. A further opportunity to speak directly to Ministers will be given by my right hon. Friend's recently announced Race Relations Forum. I do not plan to hold regular meetings.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to meet the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. [21868]

The Prime Minister: I expect to meet Sir Herman Ouseley from time to time in the course of my official duties.

Beef Import Ban

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 15 December, *Official Report,* column 33, if he will make a statement on how the Government will ensure that the policing of the import ban is appropriate. [21846]

The Prime Minister: Imports of animal products from non-EU Member States must be imported through Border Inspection Posts. All consignments undergo documentary checks. Some also undergo identity and physical checks.

Because of our obligations under the EU treaties, there are no routine checks on products from other EU Member States. Border controls were removed on the introduction of the Single Market. Controls on imported animal products depend on random non-discriminatory checks. For the purpose of the SRM controls, we are seeking to introduce a number of measures designed to police the requirement for veterinary certification, involving MAFF and local authorities.

IRA Meeting

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Prime Minister how many letters he has received opposing the visits of IRA Army Council members to Downing Street on 11 December. [21702]

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations on the talks process.

WALES

European Funding

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of Objective 5b funding in Wales in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 1996. [21592]

Mr. Ron Davies: £26.8 million was committed under the Dyfed Gwynedd Powys Operational Programme for 1992–93 through the ERDF and ESF Structural funds. The Rural Wales Single Programming Document 1994–99 makes available some £129 million through the ERDF, ESF and EAGGF Structural Funds.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he is undertaking in relation to the future of the Information Group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority as regards linkage with a health authority or the Welsh Assembly. [21812]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Department has established a group representing the Authority, Health Authorities and NHS Trusts to consider options for the management of all of the Authority's functions and it will report in the Spring.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations he has received concerning the impact of the Welsh Assembly on the future management responsibility for the information group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority; and if he will make a statement; [21814]

(2) what proposals he has to retain the information group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority as a single entity after the establishment of the Welsh Assembly; and when he proposes to make a statement about the future of the groups. [21815]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Department has established a group representing the Authority, Health Authorities and NHS Trusts to consider options for the management of all of the Authority's functions and it will report in the Spring. I have received one letter about the future of the Information Group and its contents will be taken into account in preparing options.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: to ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the Stoner Report into the latest proposals for horizontal groundwater drainage wells in the areas affected by the impoundment of the lake behind the Cardiff Bay Barrage. [21813]

Mr. Ron Davies: This report has now been considered by my Department and I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid (Personal Injury)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total number of legal aid certificates in personal injury cases in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many of these in each year related to *(a)* medical negligence cases and *(b)* other cases, indicating each type. [21694]

Mr. Hoon: The number of legal aid certificates issued in respect of personal injury litigation in each of the last three years, by category of case, was as follows:

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Medical negligence	12,198	13,418	9,165
Accidents at work	18,820	18,567	17,141
Running down	15,911	14,116	12,689
Other personal injury	40,880	46,165	47,014
Total personal injury	87,809	92,226	86,009

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Royal Opera House

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received in respect of the Government's policy on the Royal Opera House. [20931]

Mr. Fisher: My right hon. Friend announced on 3 November 1997 that he had asked Sir Richard Eyre to lead a review of the future of the Royal Opera House companies and Covent Garden. Since that announcement we have received over 1,000 letters from a range of sources.

Departmental Corporate Identity Strategy

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the cost of the project to develop his Department's corporate identity strategy; and how many officials from his Department it will involve. [21113]

Mr. Chris Smith: To date, there has been no expenditure on the Department's corporate identity strategy, which is being developed with the assistance of the Design Council.

The current estimate of the costs to develop and implement the Department's corporate identity strategy is £79,000.

Elements of these costs will be off-set against:

(a) on-going departmental projects (eg IiP).

(b) efficiency savings arising from the project. These savings cannot at present be precisely estimated, but are expected to be substantial.

CDT have been appointed to work with the Department on the strategy and a final contract is being negotiated with them to take the process forward in parallel with the Departmental Spending Review.

The exercise is expected to involve wide consultation with Departmental staff and a Steering Group, including staff representatives, has been set up.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people living in sheltered housing accommodation benefit from the concessions of the television licensing scheme. [21388]

Mr. Fisher: Approximately 398,000 concessionary television licences are currently in force in sheltered accommodation, out of a total of approximately 643,000 concessionary licences. Television licences cover households rather than individuals; the precise number of beneficiaries is therefore not known.

BBC

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will review the system of public funding of the BBC from the licence fee to include an assessment of the effects of its broadcasts on British exports. [21701]

Mr. Fisher: The Government's Agreement with the BBC guarantees the licence fee until the end of March 2002. We intend to conduct well before then a review of the funding arrangements. This will take account of anticipated commercial revenue, including revenue from international programme sales.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what progress has been made in the process of decontaminating the Millennium Exhibition site at Greenwich; and what steps he has taken to ensure public safety. [21015]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Since English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency, purchased the site at Greenwich Peninsula from British Gas in February 1997, work on remediating the land has progressed quickly. British Gas were responsible for the statutory decontamination. English Partnerships has undertaken extensive further work to a standard suitable for accommodating the Millennium Experience. All aspects of the remediation work have been carried out to statutory health and safety standards.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Algeria (Military Exports)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *645*, what is the Government's policy concerning the underwriting of defence equipment sales to the Government of Algeria by the ECGD; and what measures have been taken for the recovery of the £97.8 million not yet recovered. [20569]

Mrs. Beckett: There is currently no medium term or short term ECGD cover for defence equipment sales to Algeria. ECGD medium term and short term cover is primarily available for sales of equipment to Oil and Gas Sector. Recovery of amounts owed to ECGD in respect of military and civil sales is being made through debt rescheduling agreements signed following multilateral negotiations between Algeria and its major creditors under the auspices of the Paris Club.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *419*, if she will make a statement on the number of inspection visits made by Euratom safeguards inspectors to each *(a)* facility and *(b)* material balance area at (i) Sellafield and (ii) Dounreay in each year since 1988; and if she will list the annual total of safeguards inspection person-days for each year in this period committed to United Kingdom nuclear facilities by (1) Euratom and (2) International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. [20778]

Mrs. Roche: Reports on the operation of Euratom safeguards are published periodically by the European Commission. These reports include information on typical Euratom safeguards inspection effort both by country and by type of installation.

The most recent Euratom report, published in 1994, contains figures for total inspection effort in the UK for the years 1989–92. Figures for subsequent years have also been published, most recently in a paper presented at the IAEA Safeguards Symposium held in Vienna in October 1997 (a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House). These figures show Euratom safeguards inspection effort in the UK rising from slightly under 2,000 person days in 1989 to just over 3,000 person days in 1996. Although the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) do not themselves routinely publish corresponding figures for their inspections in the UK, the information they have provided to us shows that such effort has ranged between approximately 400 and 670 person days per year for the period in question.

In the case of both Sellafield and Dounreay there is essentially continual Euratom inspector presence. The detailed information sought on numbers of Euratom safeguards inspection visits to Sellafield and Dounreay since 1988 is not included in the Commission's reports and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Copies of the Commission's 1994 report and of its reports for previous years have been placed in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated budget for the year from 1 May for *(a)* travel and *(b)* other office costs and expenses for her private office. [21766]

Mrs. Beckett: Budgets are allocated on an annual basis for a financial year beginning in April.

The 1997–98 budget in my office for travel and subsistence is £90,000.

Other office costs and expenses, including staff salaries, for the same period total £766,000.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many official functions of her Department she has held in her official apartment since 1 May. [21767]

Mrs. Beckett: Three.

Government Chemist

Dr. Starkey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to receive the Annual Review of the Government Chemist for 1996–97. [22246]

Mrs. Beckett: I have today received the Annual Review of the Government Chemist for 1996–97. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Coal Industry

Mr. Fallon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the deep-mine collieries which she and her fellow Ministers have visited since 1 May. [19178]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* I visited a number of deep mines before assuming responsibility for coal industry matters. My concern has been to deal with the substantial problems that had been created for the coal industry not least at Asfordby mine and Monktonhall whose representatives I have met on a number of occasions since 1 May. This has required intensive exchanges with key players, particularly representatives of the industry at all levels, and the development of policies to establish a level playing-field for coal at home and new markets for coal abroad.

Energy

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the Prime Minister's oral answer of 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *1002–03*, when she expects to announce the Government's proposals relating to the long-term energy requirements of the country. [20912]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The timetable of the review of our policy towards approval of new power stations, including the role which coal should play, will be announced shortly.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the relative efficiencies of coal-fired, gas-fired and oil-fired electricity power stations; and if he will make a statement. [21273]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* These vary according to the design and technology used. Modern Combined Cycle plant, all of which is presently gas fired, can achieve thermal efficiencies of up to 55 per cent. with the latest designs. This compares to typical operating efficiencies in the range 36 per cent. to 39 per cent. for plant using more conventional technology be they coal, oil or gas. More advanced clean coal plant based on combustion and gasification technologies are now available which offer efficiencies of 43 per cent. or more. Properly sized combined heat and power plant can achieve thermal efficiencies considerably in excess of any of the above.

In assessing our future policy towards the electricity industry the Government are taking into account the contribution made by each fuel to its overall goal of ensuring security diversity sustainability and competitive prices.

Domestic Gas Appliances

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many domestic gas appliances were condemned as unsafe by registered installers in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many cases this was due to the emission of carbon monoxide. [20722]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Health and Safety Executive that the information is not available in the form requested. However, under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 gas installers registered with the Council of Registered Gas Installers (CORGI) have a duty to notify to the Health and Safety Executive any gas fitting, or any flue or ventilation, used in connection with that fitting which is or has been likely to cause death, or any major injury by accidental leakage of gas; inadequate combustion of gas; or inadequate removal of the products of combustion of gas.

The latest provisional figures for 1996–97 show that the Health and Safety Executive received 5,819 such notifications. A breakdown of these is given in the Health and Safety Commission's "Health and Safety Statistics 1996–97" (page 163) a copy of which has been placed in the House library. However, the data do not show how many appliances were considered dangerous because they were emitting carbon monoxide.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Smoking

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* improvement notices, *(b)* prohibition notices and *(c)* prosecutions the HSE has initiated in each of the last three years in relation to the hazards of (i) smoking and (ii) passive smoking. [20124]

Angela Eagle: There were no legal proceedings taken by HSE's Field Operations Directorate in each of the last three years in relation to the hazards of (i) smoking and (ii) passive smoking in the workplace.

There were no notices issued in 1996–97' in relation to the hazards of smoking and passive smoking. The information is not available for the two preceding years.

HSE Inspectors are asked to promote the development of workplace smoking policies, where appropriate, to reduce employees' exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. This approach will be reviewed once new evidence on the risks of passive smoking has been considered further.

'Figures for 1996–97 are provisional.

Sonar Equipment

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in what year side scan sonar equipment became available to *(a)* the Royal Navy and *(b)* offshore oil exploration companies. [20358]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Side scan sonar equipment has been available to the Royal Navy since the Second World War. It was optimised for use in the relatively shallow waters of the Continental Shelf. In the mid-1970s the capability of equipment held by commercial oil exploration companies to locate and identify objects on the seabed was similar to that available to the Royal Navy.

EU Transport Directive

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made on European Commission Proposed Directive OJ C25/28.1.93 concerning the minimum safety and health requirements for transport activities and workplaces on means of transport. [20470]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There has been no progress made on reaching agreement on this proposed Directive since 1993.

Water Consumption

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what measures he intends to take to make new buildings more water efficient; and if he will make a statement; [20345]

(2) what measures he intends to take to promote greater water efficiency in households; and if he will make a statement. [20344]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Act 1995 introduced a duty for the water companies to promote the efficient use of water by their customers. At the Water Summit we encouraged the water companies to fulfil this duty with vigour, imagination and enthusiasm. We also said that we would make new Water Regulations which would include significantly tighter requirements for water efficiency.The Water Regulations Advisory Committee have recently consulted on their proposals and we are now considering their recommendations.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the average water consumption per person in each region of England and Wales *(a)* was in 1977, *(b)* was in 1987, *(c)* is estimated to be in 1997, *(d)* is projected to be for the year 2007 and *(e)* is projected to be for the year 2017. [20343]

Angela Eagle: Forecasts of per capita consumption for the years 2007 and 2017 will be collected by the Office of Water Services as part of its forthcoming Periodic Review. At the last review projected per capita consumption estimates were not separated from estimates of supply pipe leakage for the years in question. There are no published figures for 1977 and 1987. The average domestic water consumption per capita for 1996–97 in each water undertaker's area in litres per day is:

	Litres per day
Water and sewerage companies	
Anglian	152.0
Dwr Cymru	145.6
North West	136.4
Northumbrian	143.4
Severn Trent	136.4
South West	151.9
Southern	156.4
Thames	158.7
Wessex	143.1
Yorkshire	131.0
Water only companies	
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	164.3
Bristol	155.9
Cambridge	148.1
Chester	154.4
Essex and Suffolk	160.3
Folkestone and Dover	156.7
Hartlepool	152.3
Mid Kent	166.1
Mid Southern	167.5
North Surrey	160.2
Portsmouth	161.6
South East	165.0
South Staffordshire	146.5
Sutton/South East	169.5
Tendring Hundred	145.7
Three Valleys	170.6
Wrexham	148.8
York	142.4

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the quantity of extra water resources required to meet the demand of the projected 44 million extra households up to the year 2016. [20342]

Angela Eagle: The latest household projections show the need for 4.4 million additional households between the years of 1991 and 2016. It is for water companies to quantify and provide the water supplies required. This is a normal part of the planning process.

VDU Users (Eye Tests)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many visual display unit users have exercised their legal right to have their eye tests paid by their employer since 1993. [20479]

Angela Eagle: Exact information on eye tests under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 is not available, as there is no requirement for employers to report the number of tests provided. However, a survey commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive estimated that by mid-1995, nearly a million users had received eye tests provided by their employer since the Regulations were introduced in January 1993.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to ensure that employers are

meeting their legal obligations under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 on eye tests for employees. [20459]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Executive is revising its guidance booklet "Working with VDUs" for publication early next year, which will help make both employers and their workforce more aware that employers have a duty to provide display screen users with eye tests on request. HSE and local authority inspectors will continue to advise employers how to comply with all aspects of the Regulations.

Health and Safety

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the number of workplace inspections made by Health and Safety Executive inspectors and *(b)* the number of prohibition notices that were issued for each of the last four years. [20404]

Angela Eagle: HSE inspectors carry out a range of different types of workplace inspections, for example proactive or planned inspections; visits associated with special projects; visits connected with enforcement matters; and advisory visits. During their visits, inspectors may issue a prohibition or "stop" notice on a dangerous activity if the circumstances warrant it. Over the past four years HSE inspectors made the following numbers of planned inspections:

1993–94: 156,233;

1994–95: 146,330;

1995–96: 124,010;

1996–97: 115,728.

Over those years inspectors issued the following numbers of prohibition notices:

1993–94: 4,105;

1994–95: 4,296;

1995–96: 3,467;

1996–97: 3,627.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of factories that were revealed not to be registered with the Health and Safety Executive following visits by HSE inspectors in each of the last four years. [20405]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not recorded by the Health and Safety Executive and cannot therefore be supplied. Not all occupiers of workplaces for which HSE enforces health and safety are required to register with HSE. HSE's primary concern is with conditions in workplaces, regardless of how they came to its attention. To identify those factories which were first recorded following visits by HSE inspectors would involve a disproportionate cost.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding increases in budget provision of the Health and Safety Executive in this Parliament. [21391]

Angela Eagle: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced its spending priorities for 1998–99 on Tuesday 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *158–59*, which include an extra £4.5 million for health and safety. This budget increase reflects the Health and Safety Commission's estimates of the amount required to maintain direct field activity at 1996–97 and 1997–98 levels, to reinforce activity on railways and major hazards, and to start work on other agreed priorities, including increased promotion of occupational health (especially further action on stress and asbestos), continuing initiatives directed towards small firms, and protection of homeworkers.

Provision for future years will be announced in the summer, following the completion of the Government-wide Comprehensive Spending Review and discussion of priorities.

Mox Plutonium Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Minister for Transport replied to the letter sent to him on 5 November by the President of the Nuclear Control Institute concerning the use of roll-on/roll-off ferries to transport mox plutonium fuel; and what reply he gave. [20766]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Nuclear Control Institute is an American pressure group that has taken an anti-nuclear stance on a number of occasions. Officials replied to its letter on 2 December. Official replies are confidential to the recipient and cannot be divulged without their express prior permission.

Carbon Monoxide

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the current standard for carbon monoxide alarms. [20758]

Angela Eagle: The current British Standard entitled "Carbon Monoxide detectors (electrical) for domestic use" (BS 7860) for carbon monoxide alarms was published in March 1996. The aim of monitors meeting this standard is to save lives by detecting high levels of carbon monoxide; it is not intended to detect carbon monoxide levels that may give rise to chronic illness.

My Department and the Department of Health jointly commissioned a comprehensive assessment of the risks associated with exposure to carbon monoxide in the home. This report is to be published next year. We will review the need for additional action in light of this assessment and the information from the Carbon Monoxide Support's research.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to establish the prevalence of long term exposure to carbon monoxide in the home and in the workplace; and what steps he is taking to increase public awareness of this issue. [20757]

Angela Eagle: My Department and the Department of Health jointly commissioned the Medical Research Council's Institute for Environmental Health to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the risks associated with exposure to carbon monoxide in the home. This assessment has been endorsed by the Department of Health's Advisory Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution (COMEAP) and is to be published in the New Year. My Department is now considering what further measures should be taken in light of this report.

In 1997, the Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) Working Group on the Assessment of Toxic Chemicals endorsed the Health and Safety Executive's risk assessment of occupational exposure to carbon monoxide, which includes an assessment of repeated exposure. A proposal to reduce the occupational exposure standards will be considered by HSC's Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances and, if they agree, will be subject to public consultation in May 1998.

My Department and other Government Departments will continue to highlight the dangers of acute poisoning by carbon monoxide through public information campaigns. These include the leaflet"Gas Appliances: Get them checked, keep them safe" (Health and Safety Executive) which is available in English and Welsh and has recently been published in five Asian languages and mailed to relevant community organisations. Also, the Department of Trade and Industry is to circulate information to all gas users warning the public of the dangers of faulty gas appliances. We are also considering a separate leaflet publicising the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning from solid fuels.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *202–03,* if he will list the known quantities of low-level radioactive waste deposited at each of the disposal sites. [20779]

Angela Eagle: There is no legal requirement for landfill operators, or those disposing of radioactive waste, to inform the Environment Agencies of each disposal. They must, however, maintain records of the quantities of radioactive waste disposed and make these available for inspection by the Environment Agencies. The information requested is therefore not available centrally.

Waste Management

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what legislation currently governs the use of untreated sewage on agricultural land. [20669]

Angela Eagle: The Controlled Waste Regulations 1992 (S.I. 1992/588) prescribe as industrial waste sewage disposed of in or on land (other than within a sewage treatment works) and sewage removed from a privy or cesspool. The effect of this is to apply the waste management controls of Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to the recovery or disposal of these wastes.

The use of sewage sludge (a by-product of the sewage treatment process), including untreated sewage sludges, is controlled under the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 (S.I. 1989/1263).

Kyoto Conference

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what initiatives his Department is supporting in central and eastern Europe to assist in the collection, storage and analysis of reliable data on atmospheric pollution levels and climate change indicators; and on what occasions these matters were discussed at the Climate Change Conference in Kyoto. [20769]

Angela Eagle: No such initiatives are being supported by my Department; neither were such matters discussed formally in Kyoto.

Lead in Water

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many dwellings are considered to be unfit for human habitation because the drinking water contains lead in excess of 50 µg/l due to the presence of lead pipework in the dwelling; and if he will make a statement. [21257]

Angela Eagle: On the basis of information up to 1995, it is estimated that about 700,000 dwellings then had a water supply with a lead concentration exceeding 50 µg/litre. Measures have been taken by water companies since then in many areas to reduce the ability of water to dissolve lead, and this may have reduced the number of dwellings affected.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of dwellings which will be considered to be unfit for human habitation when the standard for lead in drinking water at the tap is 10 µg/l by the proposed Directive on Drinking Water; and if he will make a statement. [21258]

Angela Eagle: The standard of 10 µg/l in the proposed EC Drinking Water Directive would not apply until 15 years after adoption of the Directive, and would apply to water as supplied to the property, not at the tap. Water companies will be expected to comply with the new limit by the due date.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many dwellings were considered unfit for human habitation in *(a)* the 1991 and *(b)* the 1996 English House Condition Survey due to the presence of lead pipework and the plumbosolvent nature of the water supplies; and if he will make a statement. [21256]

Angela Eagle: This information is not available from the English House Condition Survey. Though surveyors were asked to record the presence of lead pipework, they were instructed to exclude it from any assessment of unfitness as it is not practical to measure the concentration of lead in the water supply during the physical survey.

Roads (M66)

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the M66 Denton to Heaton Park motorway to be open; which contracts for it are running late and by how much; which contracts have been granted extensions and for what reasons; which contracts have overrun their cost estimates by how much and for what reasons; and when the number 3 Audenshaw reservoir will be back in use. [21102]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The M66 extension from Denton to Middleton is programmed to be open to traffic in the year 2000. Construction is split into 4 Contracts, each of which needs to be complete before the scheme can be fully open to traffic.

Work is either under way or complete on 3 of the contracts and were are currently seeking tenders for the fourth; we hope to start work on this one early next summer with a two year contract period.

The contracts let so far have been in the traditional form of civil engineering contracts published by the Institute of Civil Engineers. This form of contract allows for payment to be made for the actual work undertaken, rather than an estimate at the time of tender, so where additional work becomes necessary, costs will rise.

So far, we know that the tender prices for the three contracts will be exceeded but we cannot yet say by exactly how much because we have not settled final accounts.

The contracts also allow for extensions of time for completion of the works in certain circumstances. On this scheme, the contract periods have so far been extended on Contract 1 by 46 weeks, on Contract 2 by 35 weeks and Contract 4 by 37 weeks to allow for unforseen ground conditions such as the extent of contaminated land and difficulties with statutory undertakers plant. Work has also been delayed by bad weather.

Contract 1 is now expected to be complete in February 2000. Contract 2 was contractually completed this month.

The traditional form of contract can provide good value for money when things work out as planned. There are difficulties, however, and the Highways Agency has been reviewing its procurement strategy and in the future will make use of alternative forms of contract which pass more risk to the contractor. The Agency is also keen to encourage a partnering approach on its contracts. In line with that approach the latest contract is being tendered on the basis of design and build.

The new dam for Audenshaw No. 3 reservoir is being constructed as part of Contract 1. Completion is expected in 1999 when the dam will be handed over to the North West Water who will decide when it will be back in use.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate how many homes could be assisted under the home energy efficiency scheme for £380 million over two years. [21254]

Angela Eagle: £380 million would be sufficient to pay up to 2.3 million grants to householders under this scheme, assuming that the average grant value remained at its present level and that the scheme's infrastructure could cope with such a volume within a two year period. I intend to review the scheme as soon as possible to find out if it is helping the right people in the most effective way.

Road Haulage

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will restrict movements of heavy and wide loads to off-peak periods. [21494]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Proposed movements of vehicles and loads in excess of 80 tonnes and those in excess of 2.9 metres in width are required to be notified to the police. The timing of the movement is at the discretion of the Chief Officer(s) of police in the area(s) in which the movement is to take place. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has recommended to Police Forces that abnormal loads should, where possible, be moved at off-peak periods, including, where it is safe to do so, the hours of night. In timing the movement of such loads, it must be recognised that large loads frequently require police escort. This places considerable demands on resources and the Police service generally finds it difficult to provide a flexible escort service because other operational policing requirements frequently have to take priority at short notice. This can mean that Police Forces are sometimes left with no alternative but to escort loads at busy periods.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations govern the movement of heavy and wide loads on the motorway network. [21493]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The movement of heavy and wide loads on all types of roads is governed by either the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, the Special Types General Order 1979 or in the case of loads greater than 150 tonnes or wider than 6.1 metres by Order made under Section 44 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 issued by my Department. Movements of any load in excess of 5.0 metres is also subject to the agreement of my Department. Vehicles and loads in excess of 38 tonnes are required to be notified to the highway and bridge authorities on the proposed route. Those over 80 tonnes in weight and those in excess of 2.9 metres wide are required to be notified to the police areas in which the route passes.

Commuter Journeys

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of daily commuting journeys *(a)* to London, *(b)* to Birmingham and *(c)* to Bristol in (i) 1980, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the latest year for which figures are available. [21772]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The average number of journeys to work per weekday in London was just under 3 million for the period 1992 to 1996. Data are not available for other years, or for Birmingham or Bristol.

Source: National Travel Survey.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the number of daily commuting journeys in England, of *(a)* up to 10 miles, *(b)* 10 to 25 miles, *(c)* 25 to 50 miles and *(d)* over 50 miles, for (i) 1975, (ii) 1980, (iii) 1985, (iv) 1990 and (v) the latest year for which figures are available. [21779]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures for the average number of journeys to work per weekday, for residents of England, are available only for the years shown:

	Total weekday journeys (millions)		
	1985–86	1989–91	1994–96
Up to 10 miles	15.3	15.1	13.3
10 to under 25 miles	2.5	2.9	2.9
25 to under 50 miles	0.6	0.7	0.8
Over 50 miles	0.2	0.3	0.3
All journey lengths	18.6	19.0	17.3

Source:
National Travel Survey.

Wheel Loss Survey

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the results of the wheel loss survey completed on 30 April will be published. [21782]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The results of the survey looking into the number of incidents of wheel loss from commercial vehicles are currently being finalised. We expect to make these results known by the end of January 1998.

Housing Developments

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has had from, and what discussions Ministers have had with, the Environment Agency, regarding the impact of current and future new housing development on *(a)* sustainable water resources and supply, *(b)* problems of additional loading in sewage treatment works, *(c)* flood risk protection and *(d)* sustainable natural uses of flood plains in (i) England, (ii) the south-west region and (iii) Somerset. [21773]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations from, or held discussions with, the Environment Agency on these matters. The issue of flood risk protection is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The position in respect of residential development is that water companies have a statutory duty to provide supplies of water sufficient for domestic purposes and this duty extends to all new premises. Current planning guidance requires local authorities to consult with infrastructure providers, such as water suppliers, when drawing up their development plans.

Vehicle Safety

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the timetable for consultation on the EU Directive relating to special provisions for vehicles used for the carriage of passengers with more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat and amending Directive 70/156/EEC. [21632]

Ms Glenda Jackson: During the development of this proposed directive both the manufacturers and operators have been consulted extensively. The Government's position on the Commission's proposal has been described in an unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum which was submitted on 30 September and to which a corrigendum, number 9734/97, has since been issued on 11 November. The Commission's proposal will now be subject to detailed discussions by Member States and we will continue to consult interested parties throughout the negotiations. It is not possible to give a precise timetable for the completion of these negotiations.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has received from the Franchising Director on the performance of the West Coast main line since privatisation. [22093]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I met the Franchising Director on 15 December to discuss current West Coast performance issues and future investment plans. In addition to that, the Franchising Director has regular liaison meetings with my officials. Key performance issues are routinely discussed at these meetings, including the performance of the West Coast Main Line sinc privatisation. The Franchising Director publishes quarterly bulletins of performance information against Passenger's Charter targets for all Train Operating Companies, and an annual report; these documents are in the Library of the House. The West Coast Main Line franchise was taken over by Virgin Trains on 9 March 1997. Performance of these services is slightly better than it was under British Rail but is still well below Virgin's committed target of 90 per cent. punctuality by March 1998.

Asia Pacific Airlines

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what negotiations he is currently undertaking with Asia Pacific airlines with a view to providing greater competition for the proposed BA–AA alliance on the transatlantic route; and if he will make a statement. [21644]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. The competition aspects of the proposed BA–AA alliance are being considered by the relevant authorities.

Saudi Arabian Airlines

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that Saudi Arabian Airlines can operate in summer 1998 in line with the slots allocated to them at the recent schedule co-ordination conference. [21697]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department hopes to hold bilateral air services discussions with the Saudi Arabian authorities early next year. However, the terms of the current bilateral arrangements already make it possible for Saudi Arabian Airlines to operate all the slots which I understand they have been allocated for the summer 1998 season.

Correspondence

Mr. Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Minister for Local Government and Housing expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for East Yorkshire, relating to a meeting with the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden

(Mr. Davies), the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran) and the hon. Member for East Yorkshire. [21953]

Ms Armstrong: I replied to the hon. Member's letter on 18 December.

Regional Airports

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the Additional bilateral air service rights for UK and foreign airlines to serve UK regional airports negotiated during 1997. [21696]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Bilateral negotiations during 1997 either enabled or increased the possibility of services between UK regional airports and the following countries:

Argentina, Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Egypt, Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mexico, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Yemen.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the occasions in the last three years when a full regional economic impact analysis, using all the factors identified in the CAA Paper, CAP 638, has been carried out in connection with bilateral air service negotiations involving routes to regional airports; and if he will name the routes involved. [21698]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Since the publication of CAP 638, the full regional economic impact analyses have been carried out by the CAA for bilateral talks on air services with Australia, India, Pakistan, Canada (in respect of fifth freedom rights to India), Mauritius, Seychelles, Singapore and United Arab Emirates.

There have been other occasions on which the CAA's economic analyses have looked at the effects of granting additional rights from regional airports, but where full regional economic analyses have not been undertaken.

EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made towards implementing the requirements of the amended Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (97/11/EC). [22217]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's broad proposals for implementing the amended Environmental Impact Assessment Directive were set out in an initial consultation paper issued on 30 July. In the light of the responses to that paper, I am pleased to announce today the start of a second, more detailed consultation exercise on the thresholds to be used by planning authorities and others as filters in assessing whether a particular project is likely to have significant effects on the environment and so warrant environmental assessment.

The proposed thresholds would apply to a range of projects covered by the Town and Country Planning and other consent systems in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Copies of the consultation paper have been sent to other Government Departments and to a wide range of business, government and environmental organisations. Copies have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Comments on the Government's proposals should be made to my Department, the Scottish Office or Northern Ireland Office as appropriate by 27 February 1998.

EU Transport Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the result of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 10 and 11 December. [22250]

Dr. Strang: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 10 and 11 December. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London and I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council reached agreement on mandates for the Commission to negotiate Community shipping agreements with India and China. Member States will continue to be involved in the negotiating process and the agreed negotiating mandates reflect this.

The Council agreed an amendment to the EC Directive on Port State Control. This amendment will add the International Safety Management (ISM) code to the list of international safety conventions with which ships must demonstrate compliance when they enter EU ports.

The Council took note of a progress report on discussions following the Commission's communication on maritime external relations, which was considered at the Transport Council in June.

There was discussion of the recent Commission Decision extending application of the Community Regulation (3577/92) on maritime cabotage to the European Economic Area (EEA).

Following a statement by Sweden on the inquiry report into the Estonia disaster, the Commission said it would consider whether new proposals would be required in the light of this and other reports.

The Commission called on the Council for a commitment to decide at the March 1998 Council on a mandate for Community-level negotiations with the US on market access in air transport. A number of Member States, including the UK, questioned the Commission's approach and opposed setting a deadline. There will be a further discussion at the March Council. Commissioner Kinnock underlined his disappointment with this outcome, and said that the Commission would now be pursuing legal action against certain Member States.

The Council agreed that further work preparing for the establishment of a European Aviation Safety Authority should be carried out, on the working hypothesis that the new authority would be set up as an international organisation.

There was a progress report to the Council on preparations for Community membership of the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL); there were also progress reports on the proposed directives on airport charging and on cabin crew training.

The Council (with Germany abstaining) approved an agreement under which the Community will cooperate with EUROCONTROL and the European Space Agency (ESA) on the development of the European segment of a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS).

The Council adopted conclusions calling on Russia to end the levying of excessive charges for overflight of Siberia.

The Council had a further discussion of the proposed directive on heavy goods vehicle taxation and charging (the "Eurovignette" directive), but was unable to reach agreement.

The Commission reported on negotiations with Switzerland on land transport. It was agreed that negotiations should continue.

The Council agreed conclusions noting the Commission's intention to produce proposals on working time in road transport and on driver training. A number of Member States commented on the conclusions, which were prompted by a French initiative. The UK accepted the conclusions, stating that it supported the need for decent working conditions for commercial drivers, including working time, but the treatment of working time in Community law needed careful study.

The Council reached agreement on a Directive harmonising vehicle registration documents.

The Council discussed lorry blockades and the Commission suggested ways of facilitating freedom of movement during disputes.

The Commission reported on progress on a proposal to clarify and harmonise weekend and night-time lorry bans; there was also discussion of harmonised Community driving licences.

Ecolabelling Board

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about a financial, management and policy review of the UK Ecolabelling Board. [22355]

Mr. Meacher: As part of the Government's programme of regular five-yearly financial management and policy reviews of non-departmental public bodies, my Department has now begun a thorough review of the United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board (UKEB).

The first stage of the review will take the form of a "prior options" study, which I expect to be completed by March 1998. This study will assess the extent to which UKEB's functions are necessary and consider both the existing arrangements and possible alternatives for handling these functions.

The review also provides an opportunity to explore what other activities might help improve the provision of environmental information for consumers. My Department will consult widely with organisations which have an interest in this field. As well as issues connected with the delivery of the present EU ecolabelling scheme, views will be invited on the case for a national award scheme and the mechanisms needed to raise the standard of environmental claims generally.

Discharges to Water

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many offences against section 85(1) of the Water Resources Act 1991 were identified by the Environment Agency for each month of 1996 and 1997 to date; and for the same period how many prosecutions were brought; how many have been successful; and how many are outstanding; and what penalties have been applied. [20647]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* This information is not available in the form requested. Of the 20,158 substantial pollution incidents recorded for 1996, which in over 90 per cent. of cases were minor and resulted only in localised environmental impacts, the Environment Agency brought 121 prosecutions under section 85(1). Of these, 117 were successful. One custodial sentence was imposed. The maximum fine was £15,000. A further 111 prosecutions relating to incidents in 1996 have been brought to date in 1997. Of these, 108 were successful. The maximum fine imposed was £15,000. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the number of outstanding prosecutions which have been brought by the Agency for offences in 1996 and 1997 under section 85(1).

As regards 1997, data for the number of pollution incidents are not yet available. However, 36 prosecutions have been brought to date for incidents which occurred this year. All were successful. The maximum fine imposed was £7,000.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many discharges to water in excess of permitted limits have been identified by the Environment Agency for each month in 1997 to date; how many prosecutions have resulted; how many have been successful; how many are outstanding; and what penalties have been applied. [20649]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Compliance data are collected quarterly by the Environment Agency. The number of discharges which have exceeded their consented limits in each of the first three quarters of 1997 are as follows:

	Numbers
January–March	1,447
April–June	1,023
July–September	966

(The second and third quarter totals do not include figures for the Environment Agency's South West region.) Most dischargers, on being notified of a failed sample, take prompt action to remedy matters.

The Agency has brought seven prosecutions under section 85(6) of the Water Resources Act 1991 for breaches of consent which have occurred this year. Five were successful. The fines imposed ranged from £750 to £10,000. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with details of the number of outstanding cases where the Agency has brought prosecutions in respect of such offences.

Further to my answer to the hon. Gentleman on 8 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 422, thirteen prosecutions were taken in 1997 under section 85(6) in respect of breaches of consent which occurred in 1996 in addition to the prosecutions taken in 1996.

Fertilisers and Pesticides

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has, as a way of protecting the rural environment, further to tax fertilisers, pesticides and other products applied to the land. [21105]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The consultation document, "Economic Instrument for Water Pollution", issued by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on 27 November, invited responses on a number of options to reduce water pollution. One of these options is a tax or charge on pesticides or fertilisers.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Information

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will place in the Library a copy of the internal departmental guidance on the dissemination of information; and if she will make a statement. [16304]

Mr. Field: A copy of the current guidance on the dissemination of information used by DSS Headquarters has been placed in the Library. The Department's Executive Agencies issue separate guidance for their staff.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of people are currently in receipt of *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* industrial disablement benefit and *(c)* incapacity benefit (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in the Wansbeck parliamentary constituency. [19276]

Mr. Denham: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Denis Murphy, dated 18 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many and what percentage of people are currently in receipt of *(a)* Disability Living Allowance (DLA), *(b)* Industrial Disablement Benefit (IIDB), and *(c)* Incapacity Benefit (IB), (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in the Wansbeck parliamentary constituency.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics for DLA, IIDB and IB are available for Great Britain. Statistics for IIDB and IB are kept for Benefits Agency (BA) Districts and not by parliamentary constituency. The BA's Northumbria District serves the Wansbeck area.

Such information as is available is shown in the attached table.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Number and percentage of customers currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Industrial Disablement Benefit (IIDB) and Incapacity Benefit (IB)

	DLA—as at 31 August 1997[1][2]	*IIDB—as at 30 March 1996*[1][3]	*IB—as at 31 May 1997*[1][4]
Number of customers in Great Britain	1,924,360	244,798	1,732,740
Per cent.	3.0	0.4	3.0
Number of customers in Wansbeck	4,340	n/a	n/a
Per cent.	7.0	n/a	n/a
Number of customers in Northumberland (Northumbria District)	11,860	966	12,040
Per cent.	4.0	0.3	3.9

1. Figures are provisional and subject to change.
[2] Figures based on a 5 per cent. sample of customers in receipt of Disability Living Allowance at 31 August 1997.
[3] Figures based on a 10 per cent. sample of all IIDB assessments.
[4] Figures based on a 5 per cent. sample of customers in receipt of Incapacity Benefit at 31 May 1997. This includes the rates of Incapacity Short Term (Lower), Short Term (Higher) and Long Term. This figure excludes a small number of clerically processed cases.

The percentage figure is calculated by dividing the number of customers in receipt of the benefit by the population estimate for the corresponding area. The population estimate has been provided by the Office of National Statistics and General Registrar of Scotland, population estimate at 1996.
n/a = not available.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of each of the main disability benefits have had their benefits *(a)* reduced and *(b)* stopped, as a result of the Benefits Integrity Programme; and what proportion of these recipients are over pension age. [21521]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to rebuild integrity in, and public support for, the Social Security system and the way in which public money is spent. We need to focus on those who are properly entitled to benefit. This is why we have set up the Benefit Integrity Project.

The administration of this programme is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 18 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding how many recipients of each of the main disability benefits have had their benefits reduced and stopped as a result of the Benefits Integrity Programme (BIP), and what proportion of these recipients are over pension age.

As at 30 November 1997, the BIP has looked at 27,511 Disability Living Allowance (DLA) awards. Of these awards 2,339 were reduced, 1,152 were disallowed entirely, 23,363 left unaltered and 657 increased. In addition staff working on the BIP have dealt with 5,979 renewal claims of which 1,080 have been disallowed, 1,541 renewed at a lower rate, 3,174 renewed at the same rate and 184 renewed at a higher rate.

The age distribution of the awards changed as a result of the BIP is not available in the format requested. However, the proportion of DLA awards to people over pension age which were looked at, inclusive of the renewal claims dealt with by BIP staff is 10,371. Of these 762 were reduced, 310 were disallowed entirely, while 265 were increased.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average weekly mortgage interest of homebuyers in receipt of family credit; and how many have weekly mortgage interest costs of (i) up to £9.99, (ii) £10–£19.99, (iii) £20–£29.99, (iv) £30–£39.99, (v) £40–£49.99, (vi) £50–£59.99, (vii) £60–£69.99, (viii) £70–£79.99 and (ix) £80 or above. [21785]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

According to the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey (FRS) the average weekly mortgage interest cost to homebuyers in receipt of Family Credit (FC) was £31 (rounded to nearest £1).

Counts of FC receipt derived from the FRS do not match administrative sources. Therefore the requested figures for homebuyer FC recipients by mortgage band are shown in the table as percentages rather than grossed up counts. In addition, the requested mortgage interest bands resulted in counts too low to be reliable. Therefore it has been necessary to enlarge the mortgage interest bands used.

Weekly mortgage interest cost	*Homebuyers in receipt of Family Credit—percentages within each mortgage interest band*
Up to £19.99	33
£20 to £39.99	40
£40 to £59.99	21
£60 or above	6

Notes:

1. The estimates are based on sample counts which have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors which control for region, Council Tax Band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non response.
2. The total count of homebuyers given is based on adult owner occupiers with a mortgage where the benefit unit to which the adult belongs is in receipt of Family Credit. A benefit unit is a single adult or couple living as married and any dependent children.

Source:

The figures are based on information from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey (FRS). The 1995–96 survey is the latest for which data are available.

DSS Estates

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement about recent developments concerning the DSS Estates. [22354]

Ms Harman: To support our aims for an active modern service, and further to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) on 31 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *591–94*, I have today authorised the signing of a contract with Partnership Property Management Limited, which will own and provide the Department with serviced accommodation throughout the country, except for the Tyneside area, which is covered by a separate project. The contract will start on 1 April 1998. This is an imaginative and innovative form of partnership with the private sector which will bring specialist expertise to the management of the estate; deliver improved value for money; result in more investment in our buildings; and allow us to share in gains realised by property developments. It gives us more flexibility to adjust the buildings we occupy to meet our changing service needs, while retaining control over location of our offices. This project, PRIME, has been a major Government procurement. It is a pathfinder project which puts this Department at the forefront of the way in which the public sector manages property.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Local Education Authorities

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the rates of improvement in Key Stage 1 SAT results in *(a)* English and *(b)* maths (i) for the schools maintained by the City of Birmingham and (ii) nationally between 1991 and 1997. [18580]

Ms Estelle Morris: The national results for Key Stage 1 in English and mathematics of pupils at level 2 and above are as follows:

Percentage

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
English	78	77	n/a	'79	'80	'79	'80
Mathematics	78	78	n/a	81	78	82	84

[1] Teacher Assessment results as there is no overall test level.

The Department has not published Key Stage 1 results by local education authority (LEA) since 1992. LEAs can, if they wish, publish the Key Stage 1 results for their schools alongside the 1997 Key Stage 2 results they are publishing in January 1998. The Government plan to publish 1997 Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 results for each LEA early next year.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list local education authorities in order of performance in terms of *(a)* percentage points of improvement between 1996 and 1997 based on pupils' achievement at level 4 and above in Key Stage 2 curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science (i) separately and (ii) taken together, and *(b)* their actual average scores at Level 4 and above in each of those subjects in each year. [18579]

Ms Estelle Morris: The national figures for pupils at level 4 show improvement between 1996 and 1997 as follows:

Percentage point improvement from 1996 in:	*Teacher assessment*	*Test*
English	3	5
Mathematics	4	8
Science	4	7

The 1996 Key Stage 2 results by local education authority (LEA) area were published in March 1997 and copies placed in the Library. Each LEA will be publishing the 1997 Key Stage 2 results for schools in its area in January 1998. The Government plan to publish 1997 Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 results for each LEA early next year.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list local education authorities in rank order of deprivation, on the basis of the DoE index of deprivation, and providing for each their position in Key Stage 2 results for summer 1997. [18568]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions produces several deprivation indexes, including an Additional Educational Needs (AEN) index which is used to estimate the cost of providing a standard level of education service. The AEN index for each Local Education Authority (LEA) for 1998–99 is listed below. Each LEA will publish 1997 Key Stage 2 results for schools in its area in January 1998. The Government plan to publish 1997 Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 results for each LEA early next year.

Additional Educational Needs (AEN) index

LEA	*Index*
Tower Hamlets	2.7903
Hackney	2.6827
Lambeth	2.4684
Newham	2.4456
Haringey	2.4343
Southwark	2.4230
Islington	2.4146
Camden	2.2352
Hammersmith and Fulham	2.2278
Lewisham	2.1486
Brent	2.1484
Manchester	2.1281
Knowsley	2.1032
Liverpool	1.9476
Westminster	1.9335
Waltham Forest	1.8859
Greenwich	1.8530
Kensington and Chelsea	1.8230
Wandsworth	1.8164
Nottingham City	1.7907
Birmingham	1.7692
Ealing	1.7531
Leicester	1.6644
Middlesbrough	1.6272
Hounslow	1.5880
Slough	1.5854
Blackburn	1.5810
City of London	1.5808
Barking and Dagenham	1.5362
Newcastle upon Tyne	1.5351
Luton	1.5057
Enfield	1.5005
Wolverhampton	1.4960
Salford	1.4941
City of Kingston upon Hull	1.4888
Sandwell	1.4778
Bradford	1.4654
Coventry	1.4053
Rochdale	1.4041
Croydon	1.4020
South Tynside	1.3803
Wirral	1.3567
Halton	1.3510
Oldham	1.3473
Southampton	1.3141
Redbridge	1.3117

Additional Educational Needs (AEN) index

LEA	*Index*
Brighton and Hove	1.3066
Sunderland	1.2985
Derby	1.2978
Peterborough	1.2942
Hartlepool	1.2805
City of Bristol	1.2786
Portsmouth	1.2736
Redcar and Cleveland	1.2650
Barnet	1.2629
Merton	1.2614
Gateshead	1.2427
Walsall	1.2275
Blackpool	1.2213
Torbay	1.2193
Sheffield	1.2116
North-east Lincolnshire	1.2059
Southend	1.1983
Doncaster	1.1962
Reading	1.1892
Bolton	1.1846
Kirklees	1.1743
Stockton on Tees	1.1718
Sefton	1.1708
Harrow	1.1681
St. Helens	1.1587
Bournemouth	1.1538
Stoke on Trent	1.1465
The Wrekin	1.1426
Calderdale	1.1368
Leeds	1.1357
Hillingdon	1.1291
Plymouth	1.1189
Tameside	1.1133
North Tyneside	1.1106
Barnsley	1.0914
Thurrock	1.0879
Rotherham	1.0855
Darlington	1.0710
Milton Keynes	1.0525
Isle of Wight Council	1.0426
Trafford	1.0339
Durham	1.0147
Lancashire	1.0076
Rochester and Gillingham	1.0004
Bexley	0.9804
Wakefield	0.9762
Sutton	0.9734
Bury	0.9473
Wigan	0.9367
North Lincolnshire	0.9275
Bromley	0.9115
East Sussex	0.9110
Thamesdown	0.9083
Dudley	0.8998
Kent	0.8947
Havering	0.8866
Solihull	0.8790
Cornwall	0.8784
Kingston upon Thames	0.8725
Stockport	0.8691
Northampstonshire	0.8669
Warrington	0.8438
York	0.8360
Poole	0.8316
Norfolk	0.8303
Northumberland	0.8284
Nottinghamshire	0.8266
Essex	0.8245
Richmond upon Thames	0.8112
Lincolnshire	0.8041
Cumbria	0.8040
Bath and North East Somerset	0.7875
Bedfordshire	0.7850

Additional Educational Needs (AEN) index

LEA	*Index*
Hertfordshire	0.7831
Devon	0.7808
Gloucestershire	0.7574
Cheshire	0.7573
West Sussex	0.7512
Worcestershire	0.7381
Suffolk	0.7348
Somerset	0.7297
Warwickshire	0.7296
Derbyshire	0.7244
Herefordshire	0.7232
Oxfordshire	0.7194
Bracknell Forest	0.7122
North Somerset	0.7077
Staffordshire	0.6913
Cambridgeshire	0.6880
Hampshire	0.6820
Dorset	0.6797
Windsor and Maidenhead	0.6733
Buckinghamshire	0.6725
Wiltshire	0.6609
South Gloucestershire	0.6550
Surrey	0.6450
North Yorkshire	0.6416
Shropshire	0.6337
East Riding of Yorkshire	0.6320
Leicestershire	0.5990
Newbury	0.5614
Isle of Scilly	0.5360
Wokingham	0.5041
Rutland	0.4565

Tuition Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the income derived from tuition fees from medical students will be made available for medical school education. [20967]

Dr. Howells: Universities and colleges will retain the contribution to fees which they collect from students; and also the part of the fee they receive from local authorities, where the student is assessed as paying less than the £1,000. It is for universities with medical schools to decide how much of this income and of the grant received from the Higher Education Funding Council should be made available for medical school education.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the revenue raised through the introduction of tuition fees wil be used entirely to fund further and higher education by allowing the institutions which collect the money to spend it. [21847]

Dr. Howells: We have made it clear that the savings from the introduction of tuition fees will be used to improve quality, standards and opportunity for all in further and higher education.

For 1998–99 we have already announced that the introduction of private contributions to tuition fees for higher education will mean an extra £125 million for higher education institutions, plus £4 million to allow for a modest increase in students on sub degree courses mainly in FE colleges. In addition some £15 million of the higher education savings has been allocated to the further education sector to contribute to meeting the Government's priorities for reducing social exclusion and increasing employability.

Provision for later years is being considered in the comprehensive expenditure review.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which body will be responsible for means-testing EU applicants to United Kingdom universities in order to determine the level of their contribution to the tuition fees; how this will be administered; and how much it will cost. [21848]

Dr. Howells: In England and Wales, local education authorities will handle applications for mandatory awards from all new entrants to higher education in 1998–99. The Department intends to offer them substantial practical assistance in handling applications from EU nations. The arrangements in Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Grant-maintained Schools

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what mechanisms will be put in place to enable grant-maintained schools to re-enter the local authority-maintained sector. [21593]

Mr. Byers: The School Standards and Framework Bill will establish a new framework for the organisation of schools. All existing legal categories of mainstream maintained school—including the grant-maintained category—will be replaced by three new categories: community, foundation and voluntary. All three will be maintained by local education authorities.

Special Educational Needs

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of research on the underlying reasons for the increase in statements of special educational need over the last five years. [21508]

Ms Estelle Morris: The number of pupils with statements has risen from 161,000 in 1992 to 233,000 in 1997. Our Green Paper, "Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs" draws on the views of members of the National Advisory Group on special educational needs and on discussions with schools, local education authorities and voluntary groups. It suggests that the reasons for the increase may include financial and other differential effects of statements. While confirming the continuing importance of statements for children with complex disabilities, the Green Paper seeks views on the case for helping schools to meet the needs of more children without recourse to expensive statutory statementing processes.

Maintenance Grants

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors underlay the decision to reject the recommendations of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education to retain maintenance grants for students. [21849]

Dr. Howells: We agree with the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education that the Government should continue to provide support towards students' living costs, but we do not believe that general grants for maintenance are the answer to ensuring a modern student

support system. Instead, students' living costs should be met out of their future earnings and—in the case of better-off students—by their parents. Compared with those without degrees, graduates on average see their earnings rise by as much as £4,000 for every £20,000 of earnings within about ten years of graduation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Building (PFI)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the public sector comparator against which the Prison Service has calculated whether the prisons to be built and managed under the Private Finance Initiative at Bridgend and Fazakerley will result in cost savings; what assumptions the comparator includes; if he will publish those calculations; and if he will make a statement. [18092]

Ms Quin: The public sector comparator is the estimated discounted cost of alternative procurement and operation of a prison which will be designed, constructed, managed for 25 years and financed under a private finance initiative contract.

The principal assumptions made in calculating the comparators for the prisons at Bridgend (Her Majesty's Prison Parc) and Fazakerley (Her Majesty's Prison Altcourse) were:

(i) design and construction using public finance;

(ii) operation by a private sector contractor;

(iii) delays and cost overruns at a rate consistent with other recent public sector prison building projects;

(iv) wage inflation at historical average annual rates (2 per cent. above movements in the retail price index);

(v) an additional price increase at the end of the fifth year of the operating contract; and

(vi) the annual cost of public finance would be six per cent. in real terms.

The detailed calculations are not available in publishable form, but the estimated contract costs and savings against the public comparators (in Net Present Value terms) were as follows:

Contract value (£m)	*Savings against public sector comparator, per cent.*
Bridgend 319	17.0
Fazakerley 248	0.4
Overall savings for both prisons	10.0

In 1996, the public sector comparator for Fazakerley was re-calculated to take account of improved efficiency within the public sector, with two significant changes to the principal assumptions. These were:

(i) operation by the public sector with costs reducing in line with the Prison Service's target of 5.7 per cent. in 1997–98 and salary increases at 0.5 per cent. above the retail price index after that; and

(ii) no delays or cost overruns.

As a result, the contract value for Fazakerley was estimated to be 1 per cent. less than the public sector comparator.

These comparators were examined in the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on the Private Finance Initiative Contracts for Bridgend and Fazakerley Prisons (HC 253 of session 1997–98).

Voluntary Redundancy

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many provisional applications for voluntary redundancy have been received from junior official grades at *(a)* the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, *(b)* the Prison Service and *(c)* the other agencies and parts of his Department in the last six months; what assessment he has made of morale within his Department; and if he will make a statement. [20617]

Mr. Straw: In October, staff in the grades Administrative Assistant, Administrative Officer, Executive Officer and Higher Executive Officer working in Home Office offices in Croydon and Greater London were invited to make provisional applications for a possible voluntary redundancy scheme. A total of 1,002 provisional applications were received: 517 from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, 177 from the Prison Service and 308 from the centrally managed Home Office offices.

A number of surveys of staff opinions and attitudes have been carried out in the central Home Office, the Prison Service and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in recent years. I shall place copies of the Home Office Staff Survey Report 1997 in the Library.

In addition, I have had two formal meetings with the Home Office Trade Union side this year.

Huntingdon Life Sciences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will suspend the licence granted to Huntingdon Life Sciences to breed beagles. [21333]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Ms Kingham) on 18 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *262–63*.

The care and accommodation for the dogs meet the requirements of the codes of practice and there are no legitimate grounds on which to suspend the Certificate of Designation.

Ministerial Visit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his visit to Northfields, Leicester. [21873]

Mr. Straw: I was very impressed by the work carried out by Inspector Donaghy and his team to address the problems on the Northfields Estate. This multi-agency approach to tackling anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood disorder fits well with the proposals in the recent Crime and Disorder Bill. The enthusiasm of the Northfields' residents in addressing local problems was particularly striking.

Acklington Prison

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what date he expects to implement the

recommendations of H.M. Chief Inspector of Prisons relating to *(a)* the provision of extra work places for prisoners, *(b)* additional funding for evening classes, *(c)* weekend drug testing and *(d)* additional places on drug-free wings at HM Prison, Acklington. [21622]

Ms Quin: Weekend drug testing has already been introduced.

The report was published on 11 December and the governor will produce an action plan within 30 working days of this date which will address all the Chief Inspector's recommendations. Those mentioned in the Question require funding, and bids are currently being considered. These will have to be prioritised against other demands.

Community Protection Orders

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to the consultation paper "Community Protection Orders" were received during the consultation period; and if he will make a statement. [22248]

Mr. Straw: 92 responses were received. A list of the respondents and a summary of the main points raised can be found in the Library in a document entitled "Responses to the Home Office Consultation Document on Community Protection Orders".

Community Penalties and Electronic Tagging

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the pilot projects to test the new community penalties introduced by sections 35, 37, 39, 40 and 43 of the new Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 and electronic monitoring as a condition of bail will begin. [22249]

Ms Quin: The pilot projects will start on 2 January 1998 in Norfolk and in Manchester City Magistrates' Court. The remaining courts in Greater Manchester will be included in the pilot scheme from 1 April 1988. The trials of electronic monitoring as a condition of bail will begin in Norwich Magistrates' Court and Norwich Crown Court on 1 April 1998 and in Manchester City Magistrates' Court and Manchester Crown Court on 1 July 1998.

Freemasonry

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to respond on behalf of Her Majesty's Government to the Home Affairs Committee's recommendations on freemasonry in the police and the judiciary. [21816]

Mr. Straw: I had hoped to be in a position to do so by the end of November, but our consideration of the issue is not yet completed. I now expect to be able to reply to the Home Affairs Committee in the new year.

Private Sector Employment

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 1997 to the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed (Mr. Beith), *Official Report*, column *647*, if he will make a statement on the Cabinet Office clearance procedure for former officials of his Department who wish to take employment with private sector contractors; and how many individuals are currently awaiting clearance. [21584]

Mr. Straw: The Business Appointment Rules and associated procedures are set out in full in Annexes A and B to Chapter 4.3 of the Civil Service Management Code, a copy of which is in the Library.

One application by a Prison Service member of staff, for permission to take up an offer of employment from a private sector contractor, is currently awaiting a decision under the rules.

Prisons (Health Care)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *651*, how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* other health care staff within the prison service are currently undertaking national vocational qualifications in health care management. [20408]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* Detailed information on course content is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on how many times Brian McHugh has been strip searched while on remand in HMP Belmarsh. [20336]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* It is not possible to provide accurate figures on the number of times Brian McHugh has been strip searched whilst on remand at Belmarsh Prison. As a High Risk prisoner, Mr. McHugh is subject to a searching policy appropriate to his security category. In particular, he will be strip searched before and after visits, on entry to and exit from the prison and on entry to and exit from the court. These routine strip searches are not recorded since they are a mandatory requirement of Prison Service security policy.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many strip-searches have taken place in each of the London prisons since 1 January. [21379]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* This information is not available since prisons do not keep records of all strip searches. However, the Prison Service is reviewing searching and I have asked them to make recommendations on the monitoring of strip searches.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the projected (i) untried and (ii) convicted unsentenced remand prison population on 1 January 1998. [21537]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The number of untried male prisoners is expected to be 8,100 on 31 December 1997, the nearest date to 1 January for which projections are made. The number of convicted unsentenced male prisoners is expected to be 3,000 on 31 December. Female remand prisoners are expected to number 570 on 31 December. The projections do not separate female remand prisoners by whether they are convicted or not.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Soil Erosion

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration the Government have given to the recommendation in section 5.41 of the report on the sustainable use of soil from the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in 1996 on soil erosion control; and if he will make a statement. [20513]

Mr. Morley: The Government believe that the provision of soundly based guidance to farmers should continue to be the centrepiece of public policy on the protection of agriculture soils. For this purpose, Agriculture Departments have made available a wide range of advice about the protection of soil. In particular, the MAFF/WOAD Soil Code provides farmers with comprehensive advice about the impact of agricultural practices on soil condition. This includes advice on preventing or minimising erosion. In addition, this Department published an advisory booklet during 1997, "Controlling Soil Erosion", which gave farmers further help in dealing with soil erosion problems.

The Department has also commissioned a step by step guide to help farmers plan erosion control systematically. The draft guide will be trailed over the winter in certain areas of England with soils at high risk of erosion by water.

Olestra

Ms Keeble: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the licensing of the dietary additive Olestra. [21001]

Mr. Rooker: A number of representations have been received recently from branches of the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations asking for Olestra to be restricted to medical use only.

This fat replacer cannot, however, be used as a food ingredient in Europe until such time as it has been approved under the EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97). To date, no application for approval of Olestra under this regulation has been received.

Krebs Report

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will make a statement on the outcome of the Krebs report. [21099]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) on 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *136–37.*

Fishing

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at which meetings of the fisheries and management committees were *(a)* proposals and *(b)* decisions made relating to the minimum size of legally caught plaice; and for what purposes these proposals and decisions were made. [20970]

Mr. Morley: A proposal to revise the minimum landing size for legally caught plaice was made by the European Commission in June 1996 as part of a package of technical conservation measures. The size of 17 cm proposed was that at which plaice are retained and killed by 80 mm nets. The revised minimum size was intended to reduce the discarding of dead fish that could not otherwise be landed.

On 30 October 1997, the Fisheries Council decided to increase the minimum size from 17 cm to 22 cm as part of a compromise package. This new size will apply from 1 January 2000 and is intended to take account of the fact that plaice are often targeted with nets exceeding 80 mm minimum mesh size.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* discards and *(b)* legally landed catches for each member state of the European Union in (i) tonnes and (ii) numbers of fish in each of the years 1992 to 1996. [20971]

Mr. Morley: Data on discarding are not generally available and specific information is not reported by Member States. For information on catches, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer given to him today. No data are collected on numbers of fish landed.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the approximate weight and value of *(a)* the total fish catch of member states of the European Community, *(b)* fish consumption by member states, *(c)* total imports of fish from third nations and *(d)* exports of fish to third nations in each year from 1990 to 1996; and for each year what percentage *(a)* was of *(b).* [20972]

Mr. Morley: The available information, which has been produced by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations and Eurostat, is set out in the tables.

For parts *(a)* and *(b)* data have been given for years 1990 to 1995; data for 1996 are currently unavailable from FAO.

Data are given for all years even though not all the current 15 Member States have been part of the European Community for the whole of this period.

The information requested relating to the value of the total fish catch of Member States of the European Community and fish consumption by Member States is not available.

Part A: The total fish catch

Figures refer to all fishing areas

Metric tons in live weight (thousands)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Austria	4.8	4.5	4.1	4.6	4.5	[illegible]
Belgium	42.0	40.7	40.0	36.9	35.1	36.4
Denmark	1,517.7	1,793.3	1,996.3	1,655.8	1,916.4	2,041.1
Finland	160.4	147.4	169.7	173.8	181.0	184.8
France	869.4	819.1	821.0	860.4	852.8	793.4
Germany	390.7	303.4	307.2	316.4	272.8	298.0
Greece	146.4	156.8	179.2	199.1	223.4	198.2
Ireland	239.3	264.9	275.7	308.1	319.2	412.7
Italy	525.5	552.2	558.3	564.7	576.0	609.8
Netherlands	507.2	458.8	487.1	532.9	529.6	521.4
Portugal	323.1	325.9	299.6	293.7	269.8	265.5
Spain[1]	1,304.0	1,273.0	1,260.0	1,255.0	1,372.0	1,320.0
Sweden	260.1	245.0	314.7	347.8	394.2	412.2
United Kingdom	810.2	851.5	869.9	929.0	963.6	1,003.7

Note:

[1] FAO forecast.

Source:

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Part B: Total consumption of fish and other marine resources—FAO estimates

Metric tons in live weight (thousands)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Austria	71.0	72.2	80.1	77.9	n/a	n/a
Belgium/ Luxembourg	196.0	194.1	202.9	187.2	202.0	215.0
Denmark	100.5	105.0	109.8	103.3	n/a	n/a
Finland	163.8	163.4	164.8	163.4	172.0	168.7
France	1,737.1	1,696.3	1,654.4	1,592.4	1,582.3	1,537.2
Germany	1,046.4	981.7	1,026.5	987.2	1,060.4	1,052.3
Greece	213.0	218.6	232.4	245.9	279.4	254.4
Ireland	57.6	53.2	60.4	64.2	69.7	n/a
Italy	1,223.3	1,298.1	1,255.1	1,225.6	1,230.1	1,245.0
Netherlands	162.5	155.3	202.8	210.0	215.3	222.7
Portugal	582.4	605.8	570.7	584.8	575.2	572.7
Spain	1,351.1	1,339.2	1,373.5	1,407.0	1,457.2	1,445.7
Sweden	233.5	230.4	229.0	234.7	248.1	n/a
UK	1,107.5	1,082.5	1,111.7	1,099.8	1,121.6	1,113.0

Note:

n/a= no data available.

Source:

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The total fish catch as a percentage of fish and other marine resources consumption

Percentages

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Austria	6.8	6.2	5.1	5.9	n/a	n/a
Belgium/ Luxembourg	21.4	21.0	19.7	19.7	17.4	169
Denmark	1,510.1	1,707.4	1,817.6	1,603.5	n/a	n/a
Finland	97.9	90.2	102.9	106.4	105.3	109.5
France	50.0	48.3	49.6	54.0	53.9	51.6
Germany	37.3	30.9	29.9	32.1	25.7	28.3
Greece	68.7	71.7	77.1	81.0	80.0	77.9
Ireland	415.5	498.2	456.8	479.5	458.2	n/a
Italy	43.0	42.5	44.5	46.1	46.8	49.0
Netherlands	312.1	295.4	240.2	253.8	246.0	234.1
Portugal	55.5	53.8	52.5	50.2	46.9	46.4
Spain	96.5	95.1	91.7	89.2	94.2	91.3
Sweden	111.4	106.3	137.4	148.2	158.9	n/a
UK	73.2	78.7	78.2	84.5	85.9	90.2

Note:

n/a = no data available.

Source:

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Sea Defences

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department plans to reduce the proportion of sea defence expenditure funded by public funds. [21030]

Mr. Morley: Allocations for MAFF grants and credit approvals to operating authorities for capital flood and coastal defence works in 1998–99 are at the same level as plans proposed last year by the previous Government. Also, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has recently announced that Revenue Support Grant allocations for 1998–99, which cover residual costs of local authorities' schemes that are not covered by grant aid, will be almost 5.1 per cent. higher than actual expenditure in 1997–98. For future years the level of funding will depend on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

International Fund for Animal Welfare

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial support his Department *(a)* has given and *(b)* plans to give to IFAW. [21028]

Mr. Morley: None.

BSE

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the development by Enfer Scientific of a test for BSE antibodies in tissue samples taken from dead animals. [21845]

Mr. Rooker: We have asked this company if they would provide us with sufficient technical information to enable us to assess the test, but they have so far declined to do so. We continue to be in contact with them and hope that they will feel able to provide us with the necessary information in future.

Waste Cattle Bones

Mrs. May: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice his Department has given to butchers and local authorities responsible for waste collection on the disposal of waste cattle bones from butchers' shops following the ban on the sale of beef on the bone. [21139]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* In response to inquiries from butchers and local authorities, the Department's officials have advised that bones are not classified as Specified Risk Material (SRM) under the Beef Bones Regulations 1997, and can be disposed of in accordance with Part II of Schedule I to the Animal By Products Order 1992. Arrangements for actual disposal are a commercial matter between individual butchers and those who collect their waste.

Animal Carcases

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the backlog of animal carcases awaiting incineration; and what action the Government are taking under the Over Thirty Months Scheme to expedite the processing. [21497]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* There is no backlog of the Over Thirty Months Scheme (OTMS) carcases awaiting incineration. On average 15,000 animals a week are presented for the scheme, of which around 1,500 cattle, mostly on-farm casualties, are directly incinerated in appropriately authorised incinerators. The remainder are rendered and the remains securely stored pending disposal. Following a tender held last year, the amount of direct carcase incineration capacity available to the scheme is expected to increase to around 5,000 animals a week by spring 1998, subject to the successful companies obtaining the necessary planning and environmental consents. Much of this increase will be in respect of incinerators that are associated with scheme abattoirs, thus providing an integrated disposal solution.

Beef

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what external advice he sought when SEAC's recommendations were first notified to him. [21610]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* When SEAC's advice was notified to my right hon. Friend, and having taken into account the views of the Chief Medical Officer, he announced his intention to consult widely on proposals to prohibit the sale of beef on the bone from animals aged over six months. My right hon. Friend has received a large number of comments which were taken into account before he introduced legislation in this House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Schools

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the voluntary grammar schools which have preparatory departments; and if she will make a statement on the enrolments of these preparatory departments at each school. [20696]

Mr. Worthington: Nineteen of Northern Ireland's 54 voluntary grammar schools have preparatory departments. The most recent year for which enrolment figures are available is 1996–97 and the table shows the enrolment figure at each school.

Voluntary grammar schools preparatory departments

Name of school	*Number of pupils*
Armagh Royal	49
Ballymena Academy	90
Ballymoney Dalriada	104
Bangor Grammar	121
Belfast Bloomfield Collegiate	93
Belfast Campbell College	189
Belfast Hunterhouse College	91
Belfast Methodist College	555
Belfast Royal Academical Institution	237
Belfast Royal Academy	291
Belfast Strathearn	171
Belfast Victoria College	161
Dungannon Royal	35
Holywood Sullivan Upper	189
Larne Grammar	48
Lisburn Friends	190
Lisburn The Wallace	196
Londonderry Foyle College	51
Magherafelt Rainey Endowed	52
Total	2,913

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the costs of the current DENI capital building programme for *(a)* the controlled, *(b)* the maintained, *(c)* the integrated and *(d)* the voluntary grammar school sector; and in each case if she will list the approved schemes and their values. [21032]

Mr. Worthington: The details of my Department's major capital building programme are set out in the table. In addition, four school projects are being pursued under the Private Finance Initiative—St. Genevieve's High School, Wellington College, Balmoral High School (all Belfast) and Drumglass High School, Dungannon. The estimated capital cost of these projects is just over £31 million.

School	*Scheme*	*Estimated cost £ million*
Controlled Schools		
South Lisburn Primary	New School	1.3
Glaskermore Primary, Banbridge	New School	1.2
Belmont Primary, Belfast	New School	1.3
Muckamore House Special	New School	3.6
Drumahoe Primary	New School	1.1
Ballykeel Primary, Ballymena	New School	3.5
Grosvenor Grammar	Extension/Refurbishment	4.4
Limavady Grammar	Extension/Refurbishment	6.4
Moira Primary	New School	1.8
Newtownabbey Community High	Extension/Refurbishment	3.3
	Total	27.9
Maintained Schools		
St. Dallen's Primary, Warrenpoint	New School	4.0
St. Bride's Primary, Belfast	Conversion/Refurbishment	1.0
St. Patrick's High, Keady	New School	12.4
St. Malachy's High, Castlewellan	New School	12.8
Holy Trinity Primary, Cookstown	Extension/Refurbishment	3.0
Mullanaskea Primary	New School	1.0
Gaelscoil na bhFal Primary, Belfast	New School	2.0
	Total	36.2
Integrated Schools		
Oakgrove Integrated Primary, Londonderry	New School	2.6
Hazelwood College, Belfast	Extension/Refurbishment	9.9
	Total	12.5
Voluntary Grammar Schools		
Lumen Christi College, Londonderry	Extension/Refurbishment	5.1
St. Columb's College, Londonderry	Extension	11.5
	Total	16.6

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the funding of administration costs of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools will be

subject to the same economies and constraints as are applicable to the headquarters costs of education and library boards. [21265]

Mr. Worthington: The administration costs of the Council will be subject to economies and constraints but the level of constraint will be determined after consideration of the Council's individual circumstances.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the controlled primary schools in the North Down constituency, specifying in each case the spare capacity in terms of pupil numbers. [21424]

Mr. Worthington: The following controlled primary schools are within the North Down constituency:

Name of School	*Spare capacity at November 1997 (places)*
Dundonald Primary Schools are within the North Down constituency	None
Gilnahirk Primary School	None
Holywood Primary School	None
Crawfordsburn Primary School	12
Ballyholme Primary School	None
Clandeboye Primary School	82
Bangor Central Primary School	None
Redburn Primary School	189
Glencraig Primary School	59
Bloomfield Road Primary School	95
Conlig Primary School	61
Tullycarnet Primary School	265
Grange Park Primary School	19
Kilcooley Primary School	389
Rathmore Primary School	176
Towerview Primary School	77
Kilmaine Primary School	140
Ballymagee Primary School	64

The above list does not include Groomsport Primary School which was damaged by fire in 1966.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to consult parents concerning preparatory schooling funding; and if she will make a statement on the consultation undertaken and the amount of correspondence received to date. [21426]

Mr. Worthington: A consultative letter was issued on 8 October to all schools with preparatory departments. It was then a matter for each school to consult with and take the views of parents. The Department of Education has to date received approximately 900 responses during the consultation process.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of preparatory school pupils attend establishments that are not categorised as Catholic for fair employment statistical purposes. [21425]

Mr. Worthington: 100 per cent.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account was taken of the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment guidelines in the decision to review Preparatory Department funding; and if she will make a statement. [21427]

Mr. Worthington: A Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment analysis will be carried out concurrent with the analysis of all the comments received during the consultation process. This analysis will be an integral part of the final decision-making process.

Cottonmount Landfill Site

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the implications of phase 2 of the Cottonmount landfill site for re-cycling measures in Northern Ireland; [20783]

(2) if an environmental impact study was carried out on phase 1 of the Cottonmount landfill site; [20786]

(3) if an environmental impact study will be carried out before any decision is taken on phase 2 of the Cottonmount landfill site; [20787]

(4) to what extent she will take the draft EC Directive on the Landfill of Waste into account before a decision on phase 2 of the Cottonmount landfill site is made; [20788]

(5) if the minimum separation distance from site boundaries to residential and recreational areas of phase 2 of Cottonmount landfill site is less than the draft EC directive's general requirements; [20782]

(6) what assessment she has made of the Newtownabbey Borough Council independent environmental study into the effects of phase 1 of Cottonmount landfill site on local residents. [20784]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Kate Hoey, dated 19 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the Cottonmount landfill site at Mallusk Belfast.

There are no direct implications of Phase 2 of the Cottonmount landfill site for recycling measures in Northern Ireland. The new Waste Management and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 includes a requirement that a Northern Ireland Waste Strategy be prepared. Work is already under way on the Strategy which will inter alia promote the hierarchy of waste management options which range from waste minimisation, through re-cycling to landfill at the bottom of the list. The recycling measures which flow from the Order together with the landfill tax all mitigate against landfill. However, there is likely to be an on-going need for landfill sites for materials which are not recyclable and, for example, residues from incineration.

The application to landfill Phase 1 of the Cottonmount site was submitted on 31 May 1988 prior to the introduction of the Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989 on 1 March 1989. A formal environmental statement could not therefore have been sought for that application. An

environmental statement was requested, submitted and carefully considered with the current application for Phase 2 prior to the Notice of Opinion to approve issuing.

The EC Directive has been in preparation for a number of years and a previous draft was rejected by the European Parliament in May 1996. Article 18 of the EC directive states that Member States shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive before 30 June 2000. While the draft EC Directive is a material consideration, only limited cognisance can be taken of it.

Annex 1 of the draft Directive states that the separation distance from the boundary of the site to residential areas should be a minimum of 500 metres in the case of municipal waste landfills and 2 kilometres in the case of hazardous waste landfills. In Phase 2 of the Cottonmount site residential and recreation areas are closer to the boundary than currently stated in the draft EC Directive.

Newtownabbey Borough Council has appointed independent consultants to consider the landfilling practices of the operators and to investigate particularly the causes of odours generated by Phase 1 of Cottonmount. As work on the study has not yet commenced no account can be taken of it. The Department however, consulted Newtownabbey Borough Council for advice on the environmental health issues when processing the current application and took account of the advice when reaching an opinion as to how the application should be determined.

I hope this clarifies the position.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Visas

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for visitors visas to the United Kingdom were received in the last 12 months at Lagos; and how many of these applications were refused. [21332]

Mr. Fatchett: The number of applications for visitors visas to the United Kingdom and number of applications refused in Lagos in the last 12 months were:

	Applications received	*Refusals*
December 1996	2,785	n/a
January 1997	2,604	736
February 1997	2,366	569
March 1997	3,366	441
April 1997	3,189	507
May 1997	3,930	774
June 1997	3,923	866
July 1997	4,986	1,033
August 1997	4,365	727
September 1997	3,383	735
October 1997	2,885	762
November 1997	3,119	861

na = not available.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many infringements of Cyprus air-space by Turkish military aircraft have been reported in 1997 to date; and if he will make a statement. [21397]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have no independent statistics on infringements. We continue to support efforts to encourage the parties involved to agree a sustained moratorium on military overflights.

Turkey

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the British Government conduct their relationship with Turkey on the basis that it is their policy to support Turkey in its application to be a member state of the European Union. [21705]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Our relationship with Turkey is conducted on the basis that Turkey is a candidate to join the EU; that major changes (including in the human rights field) will be required before accession negotiations can begin; but that, if over time the necessary wide-ranging reforms are made, we will welcome Turkey into the EU.

DEFENCE

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the hourly rates payable to full-time employees in his Department in the range £4.03 an hour to £3.36 an hour; and how many people receive each hourly rate of pay as specified, in each region defined by the regional government offices. [20606]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Details of the pay rates of most MOD staff are not held by geographical area. The table therefore shows the total number of staff (all non-industrials) receiving the hourly rates of pay specified across the department as a whole.

MOD staff receiving the specified hourly pay rates

Hourly rate	*Number of staff*
£3.36	525
£3.38	1
£3.39	17
£3.42	21
£3.43	1
£3.47	20
£3.48	1,299
£3.50	2
£3.51	3
£3.53	9
£3.54	1
£3.55	5
£3.56	23
£3.57	4
£3.58	134
£3.59	6
£3.60	19
£3.61	118
£3.62	22
£3.63	18
£3.64	89
£3.65	4
£3.66	12
£3.67	144
£3.68	18
£3.69	11
£3.70	91
£3.71	29
£3.72	38

MOD staff receiving the specified hourly pay rates

Hourly rate	*Number of staff*
£3.73	27
£3.74	15
£3.75	15
£3.76	40
£3.77	18
£3.78	18
£3.79	29
£3.80	18
£3.81	11
£3.82	136
£3.83	22
£3.84	27
£3.85	25
£3.86	12
£3.87	19
£3.88	62
£3.89	18
£3.90	10
£3.91	22
£3.92	18
£3.93	9
£3.94	8
£3.95	35
£3.96	42
£3.97	11
£3.98	18
£3.99	10
£4.00	23
£4.01	30
£4.02	8
£4.03	5
Total staff	3,445

In the case of the Armed Forces, pay is based on recommendations made by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) and published annually. The 1997 AFPRB Report (Cmnd 3537) is in the Library. The Armed Forces pay is based on daily, not hourly rates, with no regional variations in basic pay.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *177*, if he will list by regions defined by the regional government offices, the number of civilian staff paid at an hourly rate of *(a)* £3.36, *(b)* between £3.50 and £3.75 and *(c)* between £3.75 and £4. [20653]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* Details of the pay rates of MOD non-industrial staff are not held by geographical area. The following list below therefore shows the total number of staff (all non-industrials) in the specified bands across the department as a whole.

MOD civilian staff with hourly pay rates in the following bands

£3.36: 525

£3.50–3.75: 857

£3.76–4.00: 661.

Smart Procurement

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the working parties he has established on smart procurement through the National Defence Industries Council, including the terms of reference on each one, its chairman and members together with their companies or organisations; and when each working party *(a)* first met and *(b)* will report to Ministers. [21125]

Mr. Spellar: There are no NDIC groups dealing solely with Smart Procurement. However, following the meeting of the NDIC on 17 July a sub group was established and tasked with producing a paper reflecting industry's views on industrial aspects of the Strategic Defence Review, including Smart Procurement.

The Strategic Defence Review Sub Group formally met for the first time on 24 September. This meeting was chaired by Deputy Chief of Defence Procurement (Support).

The Strategic Defence Review Sub Group presented the results of their work to ministers at the NDIC meeting on 29 October.

The trade associations represented on the sub group are the Defence Industries Council, the Defence Manufacturers Association, the British Naval Equipment Association, the Federation of Electronics Industries, and the Society of British Aerospace Companies.

A wide range of companies were also represented including BAe, Cobham, Fairey Hydraulics, Rolls-Royce, FR Aviation, GKN, Racal, Smith's Industries, Computing Devices (UK), GEC, GEC-Marconi, TI/Messier-Dowty and Vickers.

Defence Industry

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the policy framework within which the United Kingdom defence industry can make decisions on how to restructure. [21127]

Mr. Spellar: It is for defence companies themselves to take the lead on determining the future structure of the industry. However, we recognise that Governments, who are the only legitimate buyers of defence equipment, can have a major constructive influence. Accordingly, the UK, France and Germany have been working together to set a baseline position for the restructuring of the European aerospace and defence industries. These discussions culminated in the issue of a statement by the three Heads of Government on 9 December. The clear message of the statement is that the three Governments, whose industries form the bulk of the European defence industrial base, are now working together to facilitate the process of change.

A programme of work to resolve practical issues falling mainly within the sphere of Defence Ministers has been agreed and is being taken forward by the National Armaments Directors of the three nations.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* United Kingdom defence companies, *(b)* foreign-owned defence companies based in the United Kingdom, *(c)* foreign defence companies, *(d)* foreign governments and *(e)* the European

Commission on the Government's role in facilitating international agreements to allow mergers or joint ventures to proceed. [21126]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence meets a wide range of defence companies, both UK and foreign, on a regular basis. Where appropriate, discussions at these meetings cover defence industry restructuring and the Government's role in facilitating this.

The Governments of the UK, France and Germany have been working together to establish a baseline position for the restructuring of the European aerospace and defence industries. These discussions culminated in the issue of a statement by the three heads of Government on 9 December.

There have been no discussions as yet with the European Commission.

Royal Ordnance, Bridgwater

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of Royal Ordnance, Bridgwater. [21123]

Mr. Spellar: The production of military explosives at Royal Ordnance, Bridgwater would cease if Royal Ordnance plc and the French company Société Nationale des Poudres et Explosifs (SNPE) were to form the joint venture that the companies have expressed an intention of forming in the field of ammunition and military explosives.

If pursued, such a joint venture would need to be considered by the appropriate regulatory authorities and in consultation with the French Government. The strategic implications of any proposal would be examined with great care as part of that consideration.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future anti-personnel scatterable mine project. [21570]

Mr. Spellar: On 3 December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development signed the Ottawa Convention which will ban the use, stockpiling, import, export, transfer and manufacture of anti-personnel mines. Accordingly, the United Kingdom will not procure any new anti-personnel mines; we will therefore not proceed with the Future Anti-Personnel Scatterable Mine project.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there has been any modification of the contract to supply 29 volcano vehicle launched scatterable mine systems and associated equipment and munitions, due to enter service in 1999; and if he will make a statement. [21571]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Eurofighter

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the effect on the overseas sales potential of Eurofighter of the questions put to the Minister for Defence Procurement by the BBC at the Dubai Air Show and broadcast on "Panorama".

Mr. Spellar: None. As my noble Friend made clear at Dubai, the Eurofighter programme is proceeding well and the aircraft has significant export potential.

SCOTLAND

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem include costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21569]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* My Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem do not specifically include costs relating to the embedded chip problem. However, initial investigative work suggests that these costs are unlikely to be substantial and can be met from within existing budgets.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what millennium compliance problems have occurred to date in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* other public bodies; and if he will make a statement. [21568]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* To date there have been no reported millennium compliance problems in my Department or its Agencies. Action by other public bodies in Scotland is a matter for them as separate corporate entities, although my Department monitors Year 2000 compliance activity in the public sector in Scotland generally; no compliance problems have been reported to date. My Department has taken steps to ensure that public sector organisations in Scotland are aware of the actions necessary to address the problem and will continue to monitor progress.

HEALTH

Tobacco Consumption

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what percentage tobacco consumption in the United Kingdom has changed up to 1996 since (i) 1975, (ii) 1978, (iii) 1990 and (iv) 1993. [19707]

Ms Jowell: Information about cigarettes released for home consumption in the United Kingdom is shown in the table. The data include home produced and imported cigarettes, but exclude cigars, hand rolling tobacco and other tobacco products.

Cigarettes released for home consumption

United Kingdom, 1975 to 1996 — *Thousand million*

	[1]1975	[2]1977	1978	1990	1993	1996
Cigarettes released	132.6	124.9	125.7	97.8	95.2	83.3
Percentage change up to 1996	–37	–33	–34	–15	–13	—

Note:
The figures do not include cigarettes where UK duty has not been paid.
Sources:
[1] 1975—Sales data from Tobacco Advisory Council (TAC), now Tobacco Manufacturers Association (TMA) cited in Wald & Nicolaides-Bouman: UK Smoking Statistics.
[2] 1977 onwards—HM Customs & Excise.

Prevalence of cigarette smoking

Great Britain, 1992 to 1996

	Percentages
1992	28
1994	27
1996	28

Note:
1. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole figure.
Source:
ONS General Household Survey Analysis by DH (SD2D).

Cigarettes released for home consumption

UK, 1992 to 1996

	Billions
1992	85
1993	95
1994	93
1995	80
1996	83

Notes:
Based on calendar years.
Data rounded to the nearest billion.
Source:
HM Customs & Excise.
Analysis by DH (SD2D).

Speech Impediments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people in the United Kingdom who are *(a)* physically unable to speak and *(b)* have serious speech impediment. [19657]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* Estimates of this kind vary because of the wide range of conditions involved and the different criteria used. However, a study by Enderby and Davies (1989) suggested that the number of individuals unable to speak or with significant difficulty in doing so may be classified as follows:

	Per 100,000 population
Cerebral Palsy	20
Parkinson's Disease	23
Multiple Sclerosis	10
Muscular Dystrophy	2
Motor Neurone Disease	1.2
Myasthenia Gravis	0.5
Huntingdon's Chorea	0.2
Friedrich's Syndrome	0.7

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioner fundholders have purchased communication aids for use by people physically unable to speak in the last year. [19659]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* General practitioner fundholders have been able to purchase communication aids for their patients since 1995. They were also given a leaflet containing expert advice on the subject at this time. We do not have information about the percentage of them who have purchased these aids.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people who are *(a)* physically unable to speak and *(b)* have serious speech impediments have been provided with a communication aid by the National Health Service in the last year. [19658]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The number of communication aids provided is not collected centrally. The Department has sought to reduce the burden of data collection on the National Health Service and the collection of additional information of this kind would not be in line with this policy.

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria determined his choice of the Minister for Public Health to lead the Tobacco Review. [16746]

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health is responsible for policy on tobacco. Work on the Tobacco Review forms part of these duties.

Public Health

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for taking forward European Union public health issues during the forthcoming United Kingdom presidency of the EU. [22251]

Ms Jowell: The Government's main priority in the public health sphere during the United Kingdom Presidency of the European Union will be to demonstrate the practical relevance of the EU in promoting better health.

There is already a substantial agenda for the Health Council which will meet on 30 April 1998 and which I shall chair. The main topics for the Health Council during the UK Presidency will be:

Communicable diseases

The European Parliament is due to adopt in January its opinion on the Council's common position on the proposal to establish a Community network for the surveillance of communicable diseases. The UK Presidency will seek to reach agreement on a final version of the decision. We will also arrange for the Council to review progress by the European Union–United States task force which is considering how to establish a global network for communicable disease surveillance.

Tobacco

The UK Presidency will take forward as appropriate any new proposals for the Community action which the Commission may bring forward to follow up its communication on combating tobacco consumption. The European Parliament will be considering the Council's common position on the

proposal for a Directive banning tobacco advertising and the UK Presidency will stand ready to facilitate adoption of a final version of the Directive.

Rare diseases, pollution-related diseases and injury prevention

The UK Presidency hopes that the European Parliament will deliver its opinion on these three proposals for new public health programmes in time for the Council to adopt common positions at the Health Council meeting on 30 April.

Screening of blood donors and donations

We will take forward consideration of the Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on the screening of blood donors and donations. Although a recommendation is not binding on Member States, its adoption will signal their commitment to coordinate measures across the EU to secure blood safety.

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs)

The UK Presidency will ensure the Council keeps under review developments in understanding of the causes and routes of transmission of the agent responsible for new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease.

Discussion on the future of public health in the EU

The UK Presidency hopes to hold a discussion on Community action in the field of public health after 2001 taking into account the new European Treaty agreed in Amsterdam in June, should this be ratified, and the forthcoming enlargement of the Union.

The discussion could also focus on how Health Ministers of the 15 EU Member States might establish effective working relationships with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus to ensure that public health policy matters are properly considered in their plans to join the European Union so that an enlarged Union is able to continue to provide a high level of health protection for its citizens. In this context, the Council would clearly need to take account of the work already being done in the field of public health by the World Health Organisation and in particular its European Region and by the Council of Europe.

The Government also intend using opportunities outside the formal EU institutional framework to raise the profile of the EU public health agenda and to consider how it can contribute in practical ways to better public health across the Union. The Department of Health is discussing with, among others, the British Medical Association and the Royal college of Nursing about conferences planned for the UK Presidency to build on the discussions started in the Health Council about the future of public health in the EU in the next century. These events will provide further evidence of the Government's determination to demonstrate how the EU public health machinery can be made to work towards achieving a better quality of life for the people of Europe.

Primary Care Data

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if primary care will continue to receive funding to collect activity data. [21362]

Mr. Milburn: Primary Care Groups will receive financial support to fulfil their management functions.

Payment for data collection beyond normal primary care duties will continue to be considered on a case by case basis.

"The New NHS"

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraph 5.19 of the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) how the prescribing budget will relate to the unified budget; and if he will make a statement on the setting of the budget. [21363]

Mr. Milburn: The prescribing budget will form one of the elements within the unified budget, but the Primary Care Group will be able to choose how its total budget is deployed, and no individual element will be artificially capped.

All elements of the health authority's and Primary Care Group's unified budget will have fair, target, shares set by a weighted capitation formula. Practice level prescribing budgets will be set using similar methodologies to those used now.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the impact of proposals in the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) on the numbers of health authorities in isolated areas. [21365]

Mr. Milburn: We expect to see fewer health authorities covering larger areas. As the White Paper makes clear, however, there will be no central blueprint for health authority mergers: local decision rather than national edict will determine the numbers and location of health authorities.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the impact of the proposals contained in the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) on geographical equity of access to *(a)* fertility treatments, *(b)* contraception and *(c)* abortion services. [21366]

Ms Jowell: The White Paper "The New NHS" outlines a number of steps which the Government will be taking to improve the consistency of service provision throughout the National Health Service. We will challenge and address variations which are not based on the health needs and wishes of local people. We will aim for maximum consistency while still allowing appropriate local and individual responsiveness.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraph 3.9 of the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) if the single unified budget will be capped. [21367]

Mr. Milburn: Yes. Primary Care Groups which take devolved responsibility for the single unified budget will be responsible for managing services within a cash limit, as health authorities and general practitioner fundholders currently are.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) how freedom of referral according to patient need and choice will be maintained. [21370]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) is fully consistent with general practitioners' freedom of referral. Primary Care Groups will be able to develop long term agreements with National Health Service trusts that reflect the views of all local GPs and are sensitive to their referral choices. The arrangements to replace the internal market system of extra contractual referrals, substituting adjustments to allocations for the former bureaucratic invoicing system, will cover the freedom to refer outside these agreements in special cases, combining the freedom to refer with the ability to fund.

NHS Direct

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures will be followed in circumstances where the advice given by the proposed 24-hour telephone advice line, NHS Direct, is contrary to advice given by other 24-hour services funded by his Department. [21364]

Mr. Boateng: Advice from the National Health Service Direct 24-hour telephone advice lines will have the same status as any other clinical advice in the NHS. NHS Direct will be staffed by qualified nurses trained in giving telephone advice and who will have access to medical support when needed.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the legal responsibility for advice given over the proposed 24-hour telephone advice line will lie. [21368]

Mr. Boateng: National Health Service bodies providing the NHS Direct advice lines will have a duty of care towards callers, as they do towards the users of the other services they provide.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from which budget the resources to fund the proposed 24-hour telephone advice line will come. [21369]

Mr. Boateng: The three pilot helplines, due to start in March 1998, will be funded centrally. Decisions about the longer term funding of the National Health Service Direct-24 hour telephone advice lines will be made in due course when the pilots have been evaluated.

Dental Services

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy not to implement the regulations which reduce from 24 months to 15 months the dental registration period. [21645]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service (General Dental Services) Amendment (No. 2) Regulation 1996 SI 1996/2051, which implemented the changes to the registration period, were laid before Parliament on 6 August 1996, and came into force on 1 September 1996.

We have no plans to review this policy, which will improve value for money by focusing payments to dentists on those patients receiving active care from them.

Any savings generated will be put back into the General Dental Service, in a targeted way to achieve better oral health for the population.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the numbers of people who will be deregistered from dentists' lists in 1998 as a consequence of the implementation of the regulations reducing the dental registration period from 24 months to 15 months. [21647]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *423*.

NHS (50th Anniversary)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds will be made available to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National Health Service; and if he will ensure that the maximum proportion of such funds is used in ways which promote patient care. [21703]

Mr. Milburn: Ministers have decided that the special occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the National Health Service should be marked with events and initiatives that reflect the Service's achievements and, equally important, herald its further development over the coming years. The Service has been issued with guidance that emphasises that the main focus should be at local level, with the active participation of staff and patients, and should reflect the caring ethos of the Health Service.

The guidance also emphasises that events should be low cost, sponsored or self financing so that resources are not diverted from patient care.

Resource Allocation

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the new Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation introduces a factor to take account of particular problems faced by islands. [21371]

Mr. Milburn: We have asked the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation to consider whether further investigation in this area would be useful.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria the Government use to measure the adequacy of NHS funding. [21372]

Mr. Milburn: The Government have made a commitment in our election manifesto to raise spending on the National Health Service in real terms every year so that we can deliver our manifesto commitments and produce a health service that is modern and dependable.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding the Government have allocated to research into Chronic Fatigue Syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [21433]

Mr. Boateng: Priorities for funding research in the Department are set very carefully, based on the burden of disease and other criteria. Bids for conducting research into chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)/myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) are therefore always considered on that basis. The Department continues to fund research into the management and treatment of CFS/ME through the National Health Service Research and Development Programme. It is currently funding an on-going research project, costing about £60,000, which is looking at whether general practitioners are best placed to manage CFS/ME patients. A recently completed research project, costing over £65,000, considered whether a particular type of psychological treatment was effective in reducing disability in CFS/ME patients. The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The Council currently provides support for one Small Project Grant in the area of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome entitled "The role of noradrenaline in the neuropsychological pathogenesis of the chronic fatigue syndrome". The total amount awarded was £37,000.

University Hospital, Birmingham

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the levels of bed occupancy in the University Hospital Trust PFI scheme in Birmingham; [21428]

(2) what is the forecast case mix of the new University Hospital Trust PFI scheme in Birmingham; [21430]

(3) if he will estimate *(a)* the capital cost and *(b)* the revenue cost of the new PFI scheme at University Hospital Trust in Birmingham. [21432]

Mr. Milburn: No Private Finance Initiative scheme has been submitted by the University Hospital Birmingham Trust to the Department of Health at this time.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie the acute bed admission assumptions made by the University Hospital Trust in Birmingham for the next year. [21429]

Mr. Milburn: Assumptions will be based on projected activity resulting from contracts placed by health authorities and general practitioners with the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust which will decide what level of services will be required for next year. It is anticipated that activity will be broadly the same as this year.

Dr. Brand: to ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of acute beds at the University Hospital Trust in Birmingham for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [21431]

Mr. Milburn: There are currently 1,100 beds in the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust. There are no plans to alter this number significantly. There may be fluctuations around 1,100 either up or down based on the time of year or commissioning requirements.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 December 1997

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ozone Layer

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in assisting developing countries to phase out substances that deplete the ozone layer; and if she will make a statement. [22065]

Clare Short: The Executive Committee of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol had its 23rd meeting on 12–14 November. The meeting, chaired by the UK, allocated US$109 million to projects assisting developing countries in phasing out ozone-depleting substances. In total, 259 phase-out activities were approved in 45 developing countries.

Most significantly, the Committee approved a US$62 million project to phase out 99 per cent. of halon production and consumption in China by 2006, four years in advance of Protocol requirements. The remaining one per cent. will be phased out by 2010. As halons are the most potent of all ozone-depleting substances, this represents a major step to protect the stratospheric ozone layer.

The Multilateral Fund totals US$1 billion in commitments to the end of 1999. The UK is the fifth largest donor and committed almost US$50 million in the period 1991–97.

Development Council

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Development Council Meeting on 28 November. [22069]

Clare Short: Ministers held further discussions on the future of EC trade and development relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States. The Council agreed one Resolution, on the use of micro-finance programmes as a development tool. The Council also adopted a set of procedural Conclusions, on the Information Society and Development, which set out further work the Commission proposes to do in the area to ensure that within developing countries the benefits from new technologies are shared by all. The Council also discussed and agreed in principle to the extension of the current Food Aid Convention for one year, until 30 June 1999, in order that a new revised Convention can be drawn up. There were exchanges of views on two subjects; the first on the follow-up to the Gender Resolution of 1995, the second covered follow-up to the Conclusions on Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development.

Eight items were raised under any other business. As they were AOB points, there were no formal conclusions. However, there was a useful discussion on the 1996 DAC Report on EC development assistance. The humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes Region in Africa and the coming Friends of Congo meeting were also discussed.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Open Government

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the total number of releases under the open government initiative. [22474]

Dr. David Clark: The latest number of records released under the Open Government Initiative now stands at over 85,000 and relates to releases up to the end of September 1997. This represents an increase of about 9 per cent. over the previous total of over 77,500, which was announced by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service in the adjournment debate on Freedom of Information on 9 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 902–10, and related the total figure as at the end of March 1997.

Public Records

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the 10 oldest sets of public records which have not been released. [21252]

Dr. David Clark: I am advised that the oldest records held by the Public Record Office which have not been released are 27 volumes of boxes of Enrolled Deposited Leases, and associated documents, of the Office of Land Revenue Records and Enrolments, dating partly or wholly from before 1900. For information on the oldest public records retained in Government Departments I refer my hon. Friend to answers given in response to a question by the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), *Official Report*, 8 July 1997, columns *391, 393, 394, 421, 425, 428, 436, 449* and *463*; 9 July 1997, columns *471–2* and *485*; 10 July 1997, columns *555, 573* and *614*; 17 July 1997, column *275*.

Admiralty House

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those Government Ministers with apartments in Admiralty House; if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of providing this accommodation to Ministers; what factors require Ministers to occupy these apartments; and if he will set out the basis on which they have been allocated to individual Ministers. [21760]

Dr. David Clark: The following Ministers are currently occupying apartments in Admiralty house:

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

President of the Board of Trade

Secretary of State for Defence

The cost to the Exchequer for 1996–97, the last full year for which figures are available was £407,300.

Under long-standing arrangements, the allocation of these apartments is in the gift of the Prime Minister.

Civil Servants

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to provide financial assistance to women formerly employed in the Civil Service who lost their pension entitlement as a result of being paid lump-sum gratuities from their accumulated pension contributions at their time of leaving; and if he will make a statement. [22106]

Dr. David Clark: I have no plans to change the rules that applied to women who resigned their established appointments before 1 June 1972 on marriage and received a gratuity.

Until civil service pension arrangements were changed in 1972, the general rule was that anybody who resigned from an established, that is, a pensionable post, before reaching age 50 automatically lost all eligibility for superannuation benefits in respect of their pre-resignation service. That eligibility could not be restored even if the person concerned subsequently returned to the service and became established and pensionable again.

The arrangements for marriage gratuities for women who married while serving in an established post were an exception to this general rule. A women who received a marriage gratuity and who later returned to pensionable service in the civil service had opportunity, subject to the time limits which applied, to refund the gratuity and count her earlier service for the purpose of any superannuation award for which she subsequently became eligible.

Any change in these arrangements would on fairness grounds also have to extend to former civil servants who resigned for other reasons from their established appointments before 1972 and who did not qualify for pension benefits. It is rarely, if ever, possible to make retrospective changes in pension arrangements.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what has been the change in the number of non-departmental public bodies since 2 May; [21792]

(2) if he will list the new non-departmental public bodies which have been *(a)* announced and *(b)* set up since 2 May; [21790]

(3) if he will list the non-departmental public bodies which have been abolished since 2 May. [21791]

Dr. David Clark: Since 2 May, the total number of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) has fallen by nine. The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and Ministers are currently examining the NDPBs they sponsor with a view to identifying further candidates for abolition.

The following table lists those bodies which have been classified as NDPBs and established since 2 May 1997, as well as those NDPBs which have been abolished or where proposals for abolition have been announced. The table also lists a number of new NDPBs that the Government are proposing to set up. Many of these new bodies will be essential in helping the Government to deliver its manifesto commitments.

NDPBS established since 2 May	*Proposed new NDPBS*[1]	*NDPBS abolished since 2 May*	*NDPBS identified as future candidates for abolition*[1]
Better Regulation Task Force	Competition Commission	Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales	Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Civil Justice Council	General Teaching Council	Assessment Panel for Construction Research	County Court Rule Committee
Civil Procedure Rule Committee	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts	Citizen's Charter Panel of Advisers	Development Board for Rural Wales
Commission for Racial Equality (Northern Ireland)	New Opportunities Fund	Deregulation Task Force	Funding Agency for Schools
Disability Rights Task Force	Police Information Technology Organisation	National Council for Vocational Qualifications	Land Authority for Wales
Expert Group on Airborne Particles	Regional Development Agencies (9)	Northern Ireland Citizen's Charter Advisory Panel	Residuary Body for Wales
Football Task Force	Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission	Regional Panels in MAFF (9)	Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers' Council
New Deal Task Force	Youth Justice Board	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority	Supreme Court Rule Committee
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority		Scottish Seed Potato Development Corporation	Tai Cymru
Royal Commission on Long Term Care of the Elderly		Sheffield Development Corporation	Urban Development Corporations (8)
Security Vetting Appeals Panel		Staff Commission for Wales	
		Welsh Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education	

[1]A number of these proposals will be subject to Parliamentary approval.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Post Marks

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what representations she has received relating to alterations in the post marks appearing on House of Commons mail. [21654]

Mrs. Roe: I have received one representation relating to alterations in the postmarks appearing on House of Commons mail. This has been from the hon. Member.

I understand that, on occasions when the machine in the Royal Mail sorting office at Nine Elms which applies the House of Commons frank to mail from the Parliamentary Estate has failed, a franking machine which applies an SW1 frank has been used in order to prevent delays. I am advised that arrangements are now in place for an alternative machine to apply the House of Commons frank under these circumstances.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Wills

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what national arrangements exist for the public registration of an individual's *(a)* will, prior to death, *(b)* enduring power of attorney and *(c)* advance directive. [20969]

Mr. Hoon: I can confirm that no national arrangements exist for the public registration of an individual's will prior to death. However, my hon. Friend may be interested to know that The Council of Europe Convention on the Establishment of a Scheme of Registration of Wills was signed by the United Kingdom on 16 May 1972. Each contracting state was required to set up a scheme whereby a limited category of wills must be registered in that state, and may be registered in any other contracting state. Sections 23–28 of the Administration of Justice Act 1982 were introduced to enable the UK to ratify the Convention. However, the relevant sections of the Act have not been brought into force.

Section 4(1) of the Enduring Power of Attorney Act 1985 imposes upon the Attorney a duty to apply to register the Power with the Court of Protection when he or she has reason to believe that the Donor is or is becoming mentally incapable. The Court maintains a register of such cases.

On payment of a fee any person is entitled to request the Court to search the register and say whether an Enduring Power of Attorney has been registered. The Court may supply any person with an office copy of the Power if it is satisfied that he has a good reason for requesting a copy and cannot reasonably obtain one from the Attorney.

While the Donor remains capable there is no obligation for the Attorney to apply for registration. There is no central register held in respect of these Powers.

There is no national arrangement in existence for the public registration of an individual's advance directive. Those making advance directives should let people close to them know of their decisions.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost to public funds of the libel case brought by Mr. Jonathan Aitken against *The Guardian* newspaper. [21259]

Mr. Hoon: The libel case brought by Jonathan Aitken was heard for 13 days by a High Court Judge. The daily cost of hearing a High Court case is £982.58, which includes the cost of the judge, administrative assistance and courtroom accommodation. The cost of a 13 day trial is therefore £12,773.54. However, Jonathan Aitken paid £150 in court fees and therefore the total cost to public funds of this case is £12,623.54.

Legal Aid (Personal Injury)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was total expenditure on legal aid in relation to personal injury actions for the three most recent years for which figures are available; and how much in each year can be attributed to *(a)* medical negligence cases and *(b)* other cases, indicating each type of case. [21695]

Mr. Hoon: Net expenditure from the legal aid fund in respect of personal injury litigation in cases closed in the last three years, by category of case, was as follows:

£ million

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Medical negligence	23.9	26.9	27.2
Accidents at work	8.1	10.7	13.7
Running down	4.2	5.2	5.8
Other personal injury	8.2	12.4	15.1
Total personal injury	44.4	52.2	61.8

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what contingency plans he has made in respect of time and cost overruns for the Millennium Exhibition. [21120]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company's overall cash budget of £758 million, which was approved by the Government during the June review and by the Millennium Commission as the basis for its grant, includes a cost contingency of £88 million. This contingency is managed centrally within the Company to ensure tight control over its allocation and use. Both cost and time issues are the subject of comprehensive and regular review at Executive and Board level. I am satisfied that the NMEC's management and control systems are thorough and comprehensive and enable early identification and correction of potential cost or time overruns. The project is currently to time and to budget.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio for what reasons the Advisory Committee on Advertising was not consulted over the appointment of M and C Saatchi in respect of the Millennium Experience. [21117]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company is not aware of any requirement to consult the Advisory Committee. The NMEC considers that the Selection Panel who interviewed the short-listed companies afford the requisite level of expertise and experience in this field. The panel comprised: Mr. Michael Grade, NMEC Board member and Chairman of First Leisure Corporation Plc; Mr. Ian Ash, NMEC Board member and Corporate Relations Director British Telecom; Ms Jennie Page, Chief Executive NMEC: Mr. Kevin Johnson, then Commercial Director Designate of NMEC.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) how much private sector money has now been pledged in sponsorship for the Millennium Exhibition; [21021]

(2) how much money has been raised for the Millennium Exhibition by the International Management Group. [21263]

Mr. Mandelson: The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) chaired a meeting of potential sponsors in June 1996 and laid the foundations for establishing significant private sector interest. That interest is being

intensively followed up. Public commitments have been made by British Airways, British Telecom and the Corporation of London. Others will be announced in the New Year.

The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) and IMG are now in the process of detailed and sensitive negotiations with a range of other national and international companies. These discussions have been given added impetus following the NMEC's announcement, in early December, that 11 designers are under contract to develop further the Millennium Experience's content. The NMEC and IMG can now consider with potential sponsors how particular aspects of content can be shaped to meet their commercial requirements while at the same time ensuring the integrity of the Experience.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) how many people will make up the junior board for the Millennium Experience; what it will do; how it will be chosen; and what its budget will be; [21013]

(2) if he will make a statement on his plans for a junior board or junior council for the Millennium Experience. [21014]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company are developing arrangements for the establishment of a junior council, including identification of membership and terms of reference. I will make a detailed statement in the New Year.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what studies he has commissioned into the likely displacement impact of the Millennium Experience on other tourist attractions in London during the millennium year. [21016]

Mr. Mandelson: The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee have recommended that the Government commission a study of the potential displacement effects of the Millennium Experience on other tourist attractions. I shall be discussing how we should respond to this recommendation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and will report back to the Committee within their deadline for responses. As I explained in a previous answer to the right hon. Gentleman on 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 79, the British Tourist Authority predict substantial benefits to the tourism industry in this country from the Millennium Experience.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what targets in respect of *(a)* numbers of visitors and *(b)* revenue he has set for the Millennium Exhibition. [21118]

Mr. Mandelson: (a) I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 21 July 1997, *Official Report*, column 392, which said that the New Millennium Experience Company's Business Plan estimates that the number of visitors to the Millennium Experience will be 12 million.

(b) I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 12 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 573, which said that the costs of the Millennium Experience will be covered by a grant of £399 million (net) from the Millennium Commission and forecast income of £359 million from sponsorship, commercial activities, visitor revenue and disposal income.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has for the Millennium Dome to be dismantled after 2000 and taken around the country. [21116]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on 1 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns 2–3.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: To ask the Minister without Portfolio, pursuant to his answer of 11 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 533, what assessment he has made of the nature of the possible potential damage caused to *(a)* Richard Rogers Partnership, *(b)* M. and C. Saatchi and *(c)* Kock Hightec by the disclosure of commercial in confidence information; and what competitions for similar contracts to those conducted by *(a)* to *(c)* are currently being assessed by his Department. [17293]

Mr. Mandelson: The nature of the possible damage is covered by Exemptions 7 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Open Government, which exempt the release of information which would harm the proper and efficient conduct of the operations of a public body and would damage the competitive position of a third party. Requiring the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) to release the details of fees agreed with their current contractors might be harmful to the competitive position of these third parties in relation to any deals they may wish to strike with other companies in the future. NMEC would not be able to conduct their business efficiently or secure good value for money on the contracts they negotiate if the NMEC, required to reveal the details of their deals, were in the process making the information available to their contractors' competitors. NMEC are currently progressing a number of works and services contracts. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, which provides advice to me in my role as shareholder of the NMEC, has an ongoing responsibility for ensuring that the Company complies with the requirement of its financial memorandum, which sets out the rules governing the letting of contracts by NDPBs.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) if he will release interim accounts and contractual information for the New Millennium Experience Company before September 1998, under the Public Interest Override provisions in Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation; [17591]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 533, what paragraphs of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation form the basis of his decision not to release interim accounts and details of contracts awarded by the New Millennium Experience Company. [17613]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) are accountable to Parliament in the

same way as any other Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB). As such they are required to produce audited accounts for the period between February 1997 and March 1998 by September 1998, and these will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament at that time. Expenditure for the period before the Company became an NDPB is accounted for in the Millennium Commission's Annual Report which was placed in the libraries of both Houses in October 1997.

Only companies listed on the stock exchange are required to produce interim accounts.

To require NMEC to produce audited interim accounts would take time and place a more onerous regime on them than on other NDPBs.

The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information only relates to requests to disclose information that currently exists. As the Company does not produce Interim Accounts, the Code of Practice is not relevant in relation to this request.

As far as the request for the disclosure of contractual information is concerned, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I have given today to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). I do not consider that the Public Interest Override provision on Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation is relevant or appropriate in this case.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio when he plans to answer the written questions tabled by the right hon. Member for Horsham on 20 November 1997, which remain unanswered. [21111]

Mr. Mandelson: I have answered the questions referred to by the right hon. Member today.

WALES

Alyn and Deeside (Assistance)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has evaluated for the restoration of full development area status for Alyn and Deeside; and if he will make a statement. [22099]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Government cannot change the Assisted Areas status of one area without considering the claims of other areas. The European Commission has the power to impose a limit on Assisted Area coverage so that, if we upgraded one area, we would be required to downgrade another area. Any future review of Assisted Areas will involve a consultation process.

Further and Higher Education Expenditure

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the total level of his Department's budget in 1995–96 prices, for *(a)* further and *(b)* higher education in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99; if he will estimate what such figures would be for (1) 1997–98 and (2) 1998–99 on the basis of the estimates of the GDP deflator contained in the November 1996 Budget; and if he will make a statement. [21955]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Department's grant for the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils for Wales is as follows:

£ million

	Provisional 1997–98	*Planned 1998–99*
FEFCW		
Cash	177.0	175.0
1995–96 prices	169.3	162.9
1996–97 prices	173.5	167.0
HEFCW		
Cash	236.8	232.3
1995–96 prices	226.5	216.2
1996–97 prices	232.1	221.6

Students (Tuition Fees)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors underlie his decision that medical and dental students should pay £4,000 tuition fees. [20095]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Like other full-time undergraduate students, medical and dental students will pay £1,000 a year towards tuition fees only if they come from higher-income families. Dependent students from lower-income families will pay no fees at all, while those from middle-income families will contribute less than £1,000 a year.

It would be unfair to exempt all medical and dental students, including those who came from better-off families, from contributing towards their tuition fees during the first four years of their study when other students on four-year first degree courses would be required to contribute. Medical and dental students will, however, have fees for their fifth and subsequent years of study paid for them in recognition of the State's particular interest in securing a continued supply of qualified health-care professionals.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the 1998 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [22245]

The Prime Minister: The 1998 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 26 January 1998. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the session will consist of 23 Members from the Labour Party, nine from the Conservative Party and four members from the minority parties.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the parties concerned, in accordance with the resolution of this House on 22 May 1992, *Official Report*, column 682 and of the House of Lords on 18 June 1992, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 290–92.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the Assembly of the Western European Union.

Representatives from the Government Benches will be: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who will act as leader; the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox); for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe); for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington); for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn); for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe); for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara); for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall); for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara); for Glasgow, Bailleston (Mr. Wray); Lord Kirkhill and Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede.

Representatives from the Conservative Party will be: The hon. Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson); for Chipping Barnet (Sir Chapman); for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) and The Lord Newall.

Representatives from the Minority Parties will be: The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and Lord Russell-Johnston.

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates.

From the Government benches: the hon. Members for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer); for Wolverhampton, South-West (Ms Jones); for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith); for Dover (Mr. Prosser); for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley); for Basildon (Angela Smith); for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Miss Smith); for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor); for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis); Lord Grenfell and Lord Judd.

From the Conservative Party; the hon. Members for Romsey (Mr. Colvin); for Ludlow (Mr. Gill); for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles); for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and The Earl of Dundee.

From the Minority Parties; the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and The Lord Steel of Aikwood.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Attorney-General how many of the Crown Prosecution Service staff in England and Wales are legally qualified; and if he will make a statement. [21490]

The Attorney-General: As at 30 November 1997, the Crown Prosecution Service employed 2,093 qualified lawyers. Of those 1,513 (72 per cent.) are employed as solicitors and 580 (28 per cent.) are employed as barristers.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18889]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Since 1 May, this Department has made some 90 announcements by press release, including ones relating to public speeches. All major announcements are made to Parliament when it is sitting, either by oral statement or written answer first. These include the review of arms export licensing criteria, the restoration of trade union rights to GCHQ staff, and the ending of financial support for trade missions to Burma. Press briefings are usually held to give further explanation to announcements, after they have been made.

European Court Judgments

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by Her Majesty's Government to advocate to governments of the member states of the European Community proposals to limit judgments of the European Court in respect of the *(a)* liability of national governments to provide retrospective compensation and *(b)* national time limits concerning initiation of cases. [21692]

Mr. Doug Henderson: None.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 767, what progress he has made in arranging dialogue with the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity in relation to the Scottish justice system and Lockerbie. [20980]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have explained our position in discussions with the Secretaries-General of the Arab League and of the Organisation of African Unity. They know that we stand ready to address any specific concerns they may have about the fairness of a trial in Scotland of the Lockerbie accused. No doubt they will study carefully the report of the United Nations legal experts who visited Scotland in early December.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the UN Delegation to Edinburgh in relation to assessing the Scottish legal system in relation to Lockerbie. [20996]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: A copy of this United Nations report has been placed in the Library today.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the types of contravention of the conditions of the operator's licence which would lead to the imposition of a financial penalty under section 2 of the National Lottery Bill [*Lords*]. [21119]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government agree with the view expressed by the Committee of Public Accounts that the Director General of the National Lottery should have the full range of powers to deal with any contraventions of the licence conditions by holders of licences issued under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. Under clause 2 of the National Lottery Bill [*Lords*], it will be for the Director General to decide whether any particular breach warrants a financial penalty. In making his decision, the Director General may have regard to the desirability of deterring future contraventions and of recovering any diminution in the amount paid to the good causes that is attributable to the breach.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what directions he plans to give to the Lottery Advisory Panel under Clause 1 of the National Lottery Bill [*Lords*]. [21121]

Mr. Chris Smith: The functions of the Lottery Advisory Panel on selection will be to advise and assist the Director General of the National Lottery in the selection of the operator for the National Lottery. I will issue the Panel with directions relating to its performance of that function and to its proceedings. The National Lottery Bill [*Lords*] requires me to consult with the Director General on any directions I might issue, and I will also provide the House with copies of these.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if *(a)* the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts and *(b)* the New Opportunities Fund will be under direct control. [21112]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Bill currently before Parliament which would establish the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts ("NESTA") and the New Opportunities Fund received its First Reading in another place on Wednesday 3 December.

Under the Bill, NESTA will be an executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Bill establishes NESTA's objects, but its Trustees will be free to determine their own policies to meet those objects. NESTA will be required to publish a forward plan from time to time and to prepare an Annual Report and Accounts. Its Accounts will be audited by the National Audit Office and laid before Parliament, together with the Annual Report.

The New Opportunities Fund will also be an executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Fund will operate within the framework set by the legislation establishing it and the directions issued to it by the Secretary of State. The Fund will be free to set its own policies and procedures in order to take forward the initiatives it is to fund, which will be determined by the Government and Parliament following widespread consultation, and will take its own decisions on grants. The Fund will be required to publish a strategy and prepare an Annual Report and Accounts. The Accounts will be audited by the National Audit Office and laid before Parliament, together with the Annual Report.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the membership of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. [21024]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Bill currently before Parliament which would establish the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts ("NESTA") received its First Reading in another place on Wednesday 3 December.

NESTA will consist of no more than 15 Trustees, including a Chairman. They will be appointed by the Secretary of State after wide consultation with professional bodies and organisations working in the fields of science, technology and the arts.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the membership of the New Opportunities Fund. [21023]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Bill establishing the New Opportunities Fund received its First Reading in another place on Wednesday 3 December.

The Bill currently before Parliament provides that the Fund will consist of between eight and 12 members plus a chairman. They will be appointed by the Secretary of State for their expertise in a wide variety of fields—in particular health, education and the environment—and their experience in areas such as grant making, the voluntary sector and business. Four of the Fund's members will be persons who appear to the Secretary of State to be suited to make the interests of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively their special care.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the criteria by which the strategic plans which distributing bodies will be required to produce will be judged. [21115]

Mr. Chris Smith: The National Lottery Bill [*Lords*] providing for the production of strategic plans by Lottery distributors received its First Reading in another place on 3 December. Plans will be drawn up by distributors following wide consultation. The content and format are matters for the distributors themselves to decide, subject to requirements set out in Clause 11 of the Bill.

Millennium Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many Millennium Commission projects have been granted funding to date; how much funding has been granted to each project; and if he will provide a breakdown of these projects by regional location; [21348]

(2) how many Millennium Commission bids, which have been granted funding, have been submitted by *(a)* women's organisations, *(b)* Afro-Caribbean groups and *(c)* Asian groups (i) at Round 1, (ii) at Round 2 and (iii) at Round 3; and how many were rejected at each round; [21346]

(3) if he will provide a breakdown of Millennium Commission bids which have reached the detailed appraisal review stage according to regional location indicating how many bids were submitted by *(a)* women's organisations, *(b)* Afro-Caribbean groups and *(c)* Asian groups. [21347]

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what sums have been allocated by the Millennium Commission to organisations within the Hayes and Harlington parliamentary constituency. [17928]

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Millennium Commission has awarded to date for projects located in the East Midlands. [16572]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to my hon. Friends in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Library.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18898]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Any policy announcement that should be made to the House has been made to the House, and it is my policy to ensure that this practice continues.

Royal Parks

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of the upkeep and maintenance of London's royal parks. [20933]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The upkeep and maintenance of the royal parks is the responsibility of the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, David Welch, which was established as an Executive Agency of my Department on 1 April 1993.

The Agency's main aims are set out in its Framework Document, copies of which have been placed in the Library. They are to manage and police the Royal Parks so that they offer peaceful enjoyment, recreation and entertainment to those who use them; they are enhanced, protected and preserved for the benefit of this and future generations; and they are managed with efficiency and effectiveness and in accordance with the principles of public service as set out in the Citizens Charter.

The objectives of the Agency include sustaining high standards of horticulture and design; attracting an increased range of visitors through publications, publicity, talks and local events; ensuring visitor safety; protecting the parks from every kind of encroachment contrary to their purpose; procuring, organising and monitoring all services in ways which ensure value for money; conserving buildings in the Parks that are of special architectural or historic interest, and meeting financial and other performance targets.

The detailed management strategy is set out in the Agency's Corporate Plan, which is approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State each year.

Tourist Attractions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the 10 most visited tourist attractions in Leicestershire. [20927]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The ten most visited tourist attractions in Leicestershire as of December 1996 were:

	Visits
1. Bradgate Country Park, Newton Lindford	1,300,000
2. Rutland Water, Whitwell	1,000,000
3. Twycross Zoo, Atherstone	422,390
4. Beacon Hill Country Park, Woodhouse Eaves	398,000
5. Foxton Locks Country Park, Market Harborough	300,000
6. Ferrers Centre for Arts and Crafts, Staunton Harold	200,000
7. Burbage Common Visitor Centre, Hinckley	200,000
8. Bosworth Battlefield Visitor Centre and Country Park	180,000
9. Watermead Country Park, Syston	175,000
10. Market Bosworth Country Park, Market Bosworth	170,000

Note:

All figures are estimates except for Twycross Zoo.

Source:

1996 Survey of Visits to Tourist Attractions in the Heart of England published by the Heart of England Tourist Board.

Ministerial Duties

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the official duties he has undertaken since his appointment *(a)* in London and *(b)* elsewhere attending (i) sporting and (ii) non-sporting events. [19103]

Mr. Chris Smith: A full list of the official duties I have undertaken since appointment could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. The following is a list covering the last complete month—November 1997—and is typical:

Date	*Official duty*
London engagements (non-sporting)	
Monday, 3	Launch of National Libraries Week at House of Commons.
	Opening of Dyson Centre for Education and Training at the Design Museum, Butler's Wharf, SE1
Tuesday, 4	British Video Association AGM at Channel 4 Video, Horseferry Road, SW1
	Reception for Round II Launch of Millennium Award Partners at The Atrium, Millbank, SW1
Wednesday, 5	Launch of World Squares Consultation at Institute of Civil Engineers, SW1
Thursday, 6	Launch of New Booklist, Lewis Carroll Children's Library, Copenhagen Street, N1
	Opening Night of 41st Film Festival, Odeon Leicester Square, W1

Date	Official duty
Friday, 7	ALG Conference 'London in the Millennium', The Royal Horticultural Halls, Vincent Square, SW1
Monday, 10	Museum of the Year Awards, Museum of London, London Wall, EC2 Musicians of Black Origin Awards at Connaught Rooms, Covent Garden, WC1
Wednesday, 12	Launch of ICA/Sun Microsystems new Media Centre at ICA, The Mall, SW1
Thursday, 13	Ambassadors for London Awards, Banqueting House, Whitehall Place, SW1 Premiere of 'Welcome to Sarajevo' at Odeon Leicester Square, SW1
Sunday, 16	Reception for Finnish Music and Culture at The Barbican, EC2
Monday, 17	Tourism Society Annual Dinner, 1 Whitehall Place, SW1
Tuesday, 18	Historic Houses Association AGM, Queen Elizabeth II Centre. Launch of London First Report "London—The Millennium City" at Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Launch of the LWT Halifax Youth Talent Challenge at the Candid Gallery, 3–5 Torrens Street, N1 'Race, Culture and Nation'—European Year Against Racism, Institute for Education, Russell Square.
Thursday, 20	The 1997 Stirling Prize for Architecture at RIBA, 66 Portland Place, W1
Monday, 24	Launch of the Local Heritage Initiative at Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, SW7 Welfare to Work Conference at The Hilton, Park Lane, W1 Launch of Architecture Foundation's new digital model of London at the Economist Building, St. James's St., SW1 ABSA Pairing Scheme Reception, Lancaster House, Cleveland Row, SW1
Tuesday, 25	Breakfast Launch of English Heritage Annual Report at 1 Poultry, EC2
Wednesday, 26	Heritage Lottery Fund—Handing over lease at Somerset House, WC2 Tourism Forum Meeting at Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, WC2 Opening of 'The Artist, The Citizen, The Entrepreneur' at Upper Street, N1 Opening of Provident Financial 'Northern Light' Art Exhibition, at the Banqueting House, Whitehall, SW1
Friday, 28	Visit to National Maritime Museum World Heritage site and Royal Naval College, Greenwich, SE1
Sunday, 30	UK Premiere of 'Lilies' for World Aids Day at UCI Plaza, Lower Regent Street, W1
Engagements outside London (non-sporting)	
Tuesday, 11	Visit to Brussels to meet European Commissioners Oreja, Pappas and Kinnock.
Saturday, 15	British-Spanish Tertulias, Emmanuel College, Cambridge.
Monday, 17	Visit to Stonehenge for site tour and meeting at Antrobus House. PTC Conference at Heathlands Hotel, Grove Road, Bournemouth.
Sunday, 30	Competition Climbing World Cup Final at National Indoor Arena, Birmingham.
Sports engagements	
Friday, 14	UK Sports Institute meeting with UK Sports Councils at DCMS, SW1.
Friday, 21	Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games meeting with Graham Stringer MP & UK Sports Council at DCMS, SW1.
Sunday, 30	Competition Climbing World Cup Final at National Indoor Arena, Birmingham

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19974]

Mr. Chris Smith *[Pursuant to his reply, 15 December 1997, c. 20–21]*: Regrettably a number of appointments were omitted from my original answer. The full information requested is listed in the table. All of these appointments have been confirmed but some are to take effect from a future date:

Sponsored body	Role	Name	Remuneration
Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection	Member	Ms Mary Beaumont	No
Advisory Council on Libraries	Member	Mrs. Grace Kempster	No
Architectural Heritage Fund	Council Member	Mr. William Cadell	No
Architectural Heritage Fund	Council Member	Ms Jane Sharman	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. Rod Natkiel	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. Christopher Price	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. David Brierley	No
Arts Council of England	Member	Mr. Trevor Phillips	No
British Film Institute	Chairman	Mr. Alan Parker	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mrs. Joan Bakewell	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Alan Howden	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Tony Elliott	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Ronnie Kells	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Gus McDonald	No
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Simon Olswang	No

Sponsored body	Role	Name	Remuneration
British Film Institute	Governor	Mr. Eric Senat	No
British Library Board	Member	Professor Michael Anderson	Yes
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr. John Jarvis	Yes
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr. Alan Britten	Yes
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr. Des Wilson	Yes
Crafts Council	Member	Mrs. Janice Tchalenko	No
Crafts Council	Member	Mr. David Davis	No
Crafts Council	Member	Mr. John Buston	No
Crafts Council	Member	Ms Jennie Moncur	No
English Heritage	Commissioner	Mr. Loyd Grossman	Yes
English Heritage	Commissioner	Miss Susan Underwood	Yes
English Tourist Board	Member	Mr. David Lunn	Yes
English Tourist Board	Member	Ms Jennifer Robson	Yes
Horniman Museum	Trustee	Profssor Sir Ghilean Prance	No
Horniman Museum	Trustee	Professor. Kenneth Gregory	No
Independent Television Commission	Member	Sir Michael Checkland	Yes
Library and Information Commission	Member	Professor Judith Elkin	No
Library and Information Commission	Member	Dr. Robert McKee	No
Library and Information Commission	Member	Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer	No
Library and Information Commission	Member	Dr. Sandra Ward	No
Library and Information Commission	Member	Mrs. Grace Kempster	No
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	Trustee	Ms Rajkumari Williamson	No
National Film and Television School	Governor	Mr. Roger Bolton	No
National Film and Television School	Governor	Mr. John McVay	No
National Film and Television School	Governor	Mr. Tim Bevan	No
National Lottery Charities Board	Chairman	The Hon. David Sieff	Yes
National Lottery Charities Board	Member	Sir Adam Ridley	Yes
National Lottery Charities Board	Member	Mrs. Stella Clarke	Yes
National Lottery Charities Board	Member	Mrs. Amanda Jordan	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Chairman	Mr. David McDonnell	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Professor Preston King	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Mrs. Vorrey Branthwaite	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Mr. Barrie Marsh	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Ms Janet Kear	No
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Trustee	Councillor Frank Prendergast	No
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Chairman	Mr. Michael Holroyd	No
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Member	Ms Hilary Mantel	No
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	Member	Mrs. Claire Tomalin	No
Radio Authority	Deputy Chairman	Mr. Michael Moriarty	Yes
Reviewing Committees on the Exports of Works of Art	Member	Mr. Ian Gow	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Ms Joan Bakewell	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Ms Sue McGregor	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Sir Ian McKellan	No
Royal National Theatre	Member	Mr. James Oliver	No
S4C	Chairman	Mr. Ifan Prys-Edwards	Yes
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. David Jordan	No

Sponsored body	Role	Name	Remuneration
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Lord Stewartby	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Professor Norman Palmer	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. Patrick Finn	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. Jack Ogden	No
Treasure Valuation Committee	Member	Mr. John Casey	No

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the charging policy at each of the national museums and galleries. [19516]

Mr. Fisher: It is for the Trustees of each museum to decide what measures should be adopted to promote access to their museum within available resources. For some that will be free admission; others will choose to promote access in other ways. We wish institutions to do all they can to balance the books while maximising access.

A review of access to the national museums and galleries began in May. This has examined the effect of charges and identified other barriers to access. Our policy was outlined in an interim statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 8 December. A consultation paper was also published inviting views on a code of good practice on access.

Further consideration will be given to all aspects of access policy for museums and galleries in the context of the Departmental Spending Review. The review is taking a fundamental look at spending priorities across the whole range of the Department's responsibilities and will be completed next summer.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what methods are used to calculate visitor numbers at free admission museums; and if his Department requires these figures to be independently audited before awarding grant-in-aid. [19510]

Mr. Fisher: Methods of counting visitors vary from institution to institution. Manual counting by security staff or warders at the entrance is used by the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the National Gallery, the Wallace Collection and the Geffrye Museum. At Sir John Soane's Museum all visitors must sign the visitors book before admission. Electronic methods of counting are being trialled at some free museums.

The manual counting methods in use are prone to error and are likely to over-estimate the true number of visitors.

It is not a requirement of grant-in-aid that the counts should be independently audited.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the level of grant-in-aid which will be supplied in the next financial year to each national museum and gallery funded directly by his Department using 1996–97 as the base year. [19511]

Mr. Fisher: The information is given in the following table.

Institution	Grant-in-aid allocation 1996–97 £	Grant-in-aid allocation 1998–99 £
British Museum	33,196,000	32,921,000
Imperial War Museum	10,678,000	10,573,000
National Gallery	18,726,000	17,889,000
National Maritime Museum	10,545,000	10,184,000
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	13,123,000	12,696,000
National Portrait Gallery	4,915,000	4,697,000
Natural History Museum	27,449,000	26,960,000
Science Museum	20,633,000	20,281,000
Tate Gallery	18,777,000	18,218,000
Victoria and Albert Museum	30,612,000	29,127,000
Wallace Collection	1,900,000	1,816,000

Broadcasting Standards Commission

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for culture, Media and Sport (1) what was the average time taken by the Broadcasting Standards Commission to investigate and respond to complaints over the first six months of *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; [20825]

(2) how many complaints the Broadcasting Standards Commission investigated in the first six months of *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; [20823]

(3) if he will list all of the programmes which have been the subject of complaints subsequently upheld by the Broadcasting Standards Commission since 1 January 1996; [20826]

(4) if he will list all the programmes about which two or more complaints have been made to the Broadcasting Standards Commission in the first six months of 1997. [20824]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The Broadcasting Standards Commission became operational on 1 April, 1997 following a merger, provided for under the Broadcasting Act 1996, of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and Broadcasting Standards Council. Prior to 1 April 1997 the Broadcasting Complaints Commission had responsibility for complaints about unfair representation and breach of privacy from those portrayed in broadcasts (which usually require a formal hearing attended by Commissioners, complainant and broadcaster), whilst the Broadcasting Standards Council had responsibility for complaints from viewers and listeners about the "taste and decency" standards of programme content. The new commission has responsibility for both these categories of complaints.

Between 1 January and 30 June 1996, 53 fairness complaints and 1,702 standards complaints were investigated, and between 1 January and 30 June 1997, 81 fairness complaints and 1,533 standards complaints were investigated. The average time taken to consider fairness complaints was 259 days in the first six months of 1996 and 184 days in the first six months of 1997. The average

time taken to consider standards complaints was 74 working days in the first six months of 1996 and 68 working days in the first six months of 1997. I have today placed this information in the Libraries of the House together with the lists requested by the hon. Member of programmes against which multiple complaints were made and programmes against which complaints were upheld.

Funding Distribution

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding has been distributed by *(a)* the Millennium Commission, *(b)* the National Lottery Charities Board, *(c)* the National Heritage Memorial Fund, *(d)* the Arts Council and *(e)* the Sports Council to projects in, or associated with, (i) Wirral, South constituency and (ii) the Wirral; and what is the average funding distributed per constituency (1) in the Wirral, (2) in Merseyside and (3) nationally by each of those bodies. [21326]

Mr. Banks: The information is set out in the following table.

Information on Lottery awards can now be found on the Department's website www.lottery.culture.gov.uk. It is updated on a regular basis.

National Lottery awards information

Distributing body	*Wirral South*		*The Wirral*[1]		*Average Wirral (Total awards/ number of constituencies) (£)*	*Average Merseyside*[2] *(Total awards/ number of constituencies) (£)*	*Average National (England) (Total awards/ number of constituencies) (£)*
	Number of awards	*Total value of awards (£)*	*Number of awards*	*Total value of awards (£)*			
Millennium Commission	0	0	0	0	0	1,844,300	1,145,026
National Lottery Charities Board	9	293,355	53	3,899,483	974,871	1,648,435	981,177
National Heritage Memorial Fund	0	0	2	54,300	13,575	986,669	1,319,766
Arts Council of England	4	106,487	17	166,639	41,660	927,949	1,755,309
English Sports Council	0	0	8	897,496	224,374	980,725	1,241,937
Total	13	399,842	80	5,017,918	1,254,480	6,338,077	6,443,215

[1] "The Wirral" comprises the constituencies of Wallasey, Birkenhead, Wirral South and Wirral West.
[2] There are 16 constituencies in Merseyside.
There are 529 constituencies in England.

Arts Funding

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what monitoring his Department undertakes to ensure that arts funding provides value for money; [21238]

(2) if he will make a statement on the factors used in determining the level of spending on the arts; [21237]

(3) what mechanisms are used to decide between national and local priorities in arts funding; [21678]

(4) what mechanisms he uses to allocate funding to those arts which his Department supports. [21677]

Mr. Fisher: In considering the allocation of resources between the portfolios for which my Department is responsible we have regard to a range of factors. In respect of the arts we are assisted by advice from the Arts Council, whose responsibility it is, with the ten Regional Arts Boards, to take detailed decisions on the allocation of grant-in-aid between artforms, and to arts organisations and activities. A range of arrangements cover the Department's monitoring of spending by the Arts Council; the Financial Memorandum, the annual Funding Agreement, the corporate and business plans. The council reports each year on spending in its annual report.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for a fundamental review of Government spending on the arts; and if he will make a statement. [21613]

Mr. Fisher: The terms of reference for my Department's fundamental review of expenditure were published on 24 July. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consultations he held with the Arts Council before its announcement that capital Lottery projects, with the exception of four projects of national significance, were to be capped; if the C-Plex project in West Bromwich qualifies as such a project; and what criteria the Arts Council has used to define national significance. [22139]

Mr. Fisher: Decisions on the allocation of lottery funds to the arts in England are made by the independent distributing body, the Arts Council of England. The Arts Council did not consult me before its recent announcement on future capital awards.

Television Licences

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will review the arrangements for giving pensioners discounted licence fees during his comprehensive review of the BBC licence fee system prior to 2002. [21614]

Mr. Fisher: Yes.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Britain has received in European Union grants for tourism-related projects in each of the last three years. [22021]

Mr. Fisher: Many community programmes have an impact on tourism, or tourism has a role to play in them even though it is not their primary purpose. No figures are therefore available which show the total spending which might have relevance to tourism. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport submitted an Explanatory Memorandum to Parliament on 31 July on European Community Document (COM(97)) 332 Final (also numbered 9712/97): Community Measures Affecting Tourism in 1995–96. The Document highlights some of the main areas of Community activity from which tourism benefits.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much national lottery money has been allocated to tourism-related projects in each of the last three years. [22088]

Mr. Fisher: The national lottery was established to help support five good causes: sports, arts, heritage, charities and to celebrate the millennium. So far £4.6 billion has been awarded to over 38,000 projects nationwide. While no national lottery funding has therefore been specifically allocated to tourism, many of the funded projects attract tourists to their areas.

Cricket

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much public money is planned to be spent on preparations for the 1999 Cricket World Cup. [22258]

Mr. Fisher: No public money is planned to be spent on the 1999 Cricket World Cup in England.

DEFENCE

Eurofighter

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Eurofighter programme. [22341]

Mr. George Robertson: I am delighted to announce that today in Bonn, along with my Germany, Italian and Spanish opposite numbers, I signed the Memoranda of Understanding enabling us to proceed to the production and in-service support phases of the Eurofighter programme.

The Government have remained resolutely committed to the Eurofighter programme and today's development represents a significant step forward. We need Eurofighter to replace our Tornado F3 and Jaguar. The first aircraft is scheduled to be delivered to the RAF in June 2002. Eurofighter is an aircraft for the future and will provide the key component of the RAF's fighting capability.

This development will be enthusiastically greeted by industry. Tens of thousands of highly skilled jobs will be sustained in the UK and in Germany, Italy and Spain during the production phase. The four nations have declared a requirement for a total of 620 aircraft, 232 of which will be for the RAF. Eurofighter is the largest defence collaborative equipment programme in Europe and is an important contribution to European defence co-operation.

Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each of the past five years the number of students who left the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham before the completion of their degree courses, stating after which year of their course they left and for what reason. [21710]

Dr. Reid: The number of UK and FCO-sponsored military students who left the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham over the last five years without completing their degree course is detailed as follows:

Year	*Total degree students*	*Fall out*	*Percentage failure*
1993	362	1 × Year 1: personal reasons 1 × Year 3: disciplinary reasons 4 × Year 1: failed 7 × Year 2: failed	3.6
1994	452	6 × Year 1: personal reasons 2 × Year 2: personal reasons 1 × Year 3: personal reasons 6 × Year 1: failed 4 × Year 2: failed	4.2
1995	455	2 × Year 1: personal reasons 2 × Year 2: personal reasons 1 × Year 3: personal reasons 2 × Year 1: failed 3 × Year 2: failed 1 × Year 3: failed	2.4
1996	439	1 × Year 1: personal reasons 1 × Year 2: serious injury 1 × Year 3: personal reasons 11 × Year 1: failed 11 × Year 2: failed	5.7
1997	317	1 × Year 1: personal reasons 1 × Year 1: disciplinary reasons 3 × Year 3: personal reasons 6 × Year 1: failed 6 × Year 2: failed	5.4

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20531]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* The Ministry of Defence is maintaining a dialogue with non-governmental organisations and suppliers to alert them to the risk posed by the millennium date change problem.

For all new MOD equipment procurement contracts, all suppliers are contractually bound to ensure that their goods are millennium-compliant. Where a company or organisation is contracted to supply a service beyond the end of the century, we are reminding them of the need to meet their contractual commitments.

MOD has in excess of 10,000 individual suppliers covering a wide range of goods and services, some operationally critical, some not. Whether to not the MOD continues to deal with organisations and suppliers will depend on the nature of the requirement and the supplier's ability to continue to meet agreed delivery dates. When assessing a tender which requires the supply of goods and services through and beyond the end of the century, MOD takes full account of the risks involved and will place contracts with only those suppliers who can provide the necessary assurances that the commitment can be met.

Troop Deployment (Germany)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are at present stationed in Germany; and what is the estimated cost of this deployment for 1997. [21890]

Dr. Reid: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Defence Spending

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in descending order the amount spent on the total defence budget per head in each United Kingdom region in 1995–96. [22032]

Dr. Reid: Total defence expenditure cannot be broken down by region. However, "Defence Statistics 1997", a copy of which is in the Library, contains information on the deployment of service personnel and Ministry of Defence civilian staff in the regions. It also provides a breakdown of equipment expenditure by region and estimates of employment dependent on such expenditure. In 1995–96, per capita spending on defence by the United Kingdom was estimated at £367.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet Gulf War veterans. [22145]

Dr. Reid: I have held, and will continue to hold, regular meetings with Gulf War veterans' representatives to listen to their views and suggestions and to explain how the Government are taking forward the various steps which I have already announced to address veterans' concerns. The most recent meeting was held on 10 December.

Compensation Review

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the review into compensating service personnel for death or injury due to service will be completed. [22244]

Dr. Reid: The aim will be to complete the review of the arrangements for compensating Service personnel who suffer death, injury or illness as a result of their military service, which was announced on 8 December, in time for the publication of a consultative document next Summer.

Falklands Garrison

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the total costs broken down by category of maintaining the Falklands garrison in the last year for which figures are available. [21648]

Dr. Reid: The outturn cost to the Ministry of Defence of the Falkland Islands Garrison for financial year 1996–97 was £81 million. This figure comprises £42 million for personnel costs, £22 million for works and property maintenance, £14 million for logistics, movements, administration and headquarters, and £3 million for utilities.

Territorial Army

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army infantry battalions and companies there were in each of the last 10 years; how many of each are planned for next year; and if he will make a statement. [21652]

Dr. Reid: The number of Territorial Army Infantry Battalions and Companies in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

TA Infantry Battalions and Companies

	Battalions	*Companies*
1988	41	164
1989	41	164
1990	41	164
1991	41	164
1992	36	109
1993	36	109
1994	36	109
1995	36	109
1996	33	95
1997	33	95

These figures do not include the SAS (Volunteer) Regiment, the Gibraltar Regiment and the Royal Irish (Home Service) Regiment.

The future size and shape of the Territorial Army, including the number of Infantry battalions and companies, will be determined by the Strategic Defence Review as part of our work on the Armed Forces as a whole.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was *(a)* the ceiling on personnel numbers and *(b)* the actual strength of the Territorial Army in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [21651]

Dr. Reid: The strength and establishment of the Territorial Army as at the first of April in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

	Strength	*Establishment*
1988	74,700	86,000
1989	72,500	86,000
1990	72,500	86,000
1991	73,300	86,000
1992	71,300	63,500
1993	68,500	63,500
1994	65,000	63,500
1995	59,700	59,000
1996	56,100	59,000
1997	55,900	59,000

The future size and shape of the Territorial Army will be determined by the Strategic Defence Review as part of

our work on the Armed Forces as a whole. I am confident that the Review will produce a coherent and imaginative blueprint for the Reserves into the next century.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army centres there were in each of the last 10 years. [21653]

Dr. Reid: The number of Territorial Army Centres in each of the last ten years are as follows:

Year	*Number of TA centres*
1988	535
1989	539
1990	542
1991	541
1992	535
1993	525
1994	519
1995	505
1996	479
1997	466

TA Centres are defined here as buildings which accommodate TA units, sub-units or detachments. Former TA Centres which are either vacant and awaiting disposal, which only house Cadet detachments, and TAVRA Headquarters buildings are excluded.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what amounts, broken down by category, were spent by his Department on private finance initiatives in Northern Ireland prior to his decision to approve the exploration of PFI pilot schemes; and on whose authority such expenditure was incurred. [21435]

Dr. Reid: I agreed on 3 June 1997 that consultation with the Trades Unions and briefing of interested firms should take place on two PFI pilot schemes in Northern Ireland. Prior to this date the Head of the MOD Private Finance Unit had authorised the placing of a contract with Coopers and Lybrand to advise on PFI in Northern Ireland. I am withholding details of individual contract values under exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. In addition the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland authorised the setting up of the nucleus of a PFI team within his Headquarters to undertake the necessary preparatory work. Expenditure of approximately £20,700 on salaries and related costs and approximately £1,350 on travel and subsistence costs was incurred prior to 3 June 1997 by members of the team. Other individuals within Headquarters Northern Ireland and the Private Finance Unit were involved in work on PFI in Northern Ireland as part of their normal responsibilities. Their costs cannot be separately identified.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the terms of reference for the PFI pilot schemes recently authorised in Northern Ireland. [21437]

Dr. Reid: The scope of the first Northern Ireland PFI pilot scheme covers first, construction and facilities management services for 370 new families quarters within the towns of Lisburn, Antrim and Ballymena and the facilities management services for an existing 21 families' quarters in Ballymena; and, secondly, provision of facilities management services for 566 families' quarters in Lisburn. This may involve transfer of the families' quarters to the service provider on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. In all cases the service period would be for approximately 25 years. The scope of the second pilot scheme is still being refined but is likely to cover a full range of services for Thiepval Barracks for a period of approximately 25 years. The general requirement, in addition to capital works, is expected to include estate management, serviced accommodation, stores management, motor transport support and maintenance, energy management, office support services, community and support services and leisure facilities management.

Building Management Staff

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary for Defence if he will list the employment options made available to Building Management staff on privatisation. [21434]

Dr. Reid: The estate management organisation in Northern Ireland, which includes Building Management, is being reviewed. There are, however, no current plans for privatisation.

Staff Pay

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies his Department has undertaken on the relative costs of employing *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military personnel in Northern Ireland, and on average salary differentials; and if he will make a statement on the factors which underlie decisions on this matter. [21436]

Dr. Reid: There have been no specific studies recently on this topic in Northern Ireland. The military and civilian manpower mix in MOD establishments in Northern Ireland is kept under review to provide the most cost-effective use of personnel. Depending on the nature of the work in question a range of factors will be taken into account, not just cost.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen and women are currently in receipt of income support; and if he will make a statement. [21649]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is not held by MOD. Should any Service Personnel be eligible for Income Support, which is unlikely in view of the qualifying criteria, a claim would be made directly to the Department of Social Security.

Border Checkpoint, Newry

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the security implications of removing the border checkpoint on the road outside Newry; what were the costs of its removal; and what estimate he has made of the cost of re-erecting it. [21438]

Dr. Reid: There are no security implications associated with the removal of the vehicle checkpoint from the road outside Newry which has not been in use since November 1994. There are currently no plans to close the adjacent patrol base.

The removal costs are estimated to be around £20,000, not including the costs of reinstating the road, which will fall to the Northern Ireland Office.

My Department has made no estimate of the cost of re-erecting the vehicle checkpoint.

Trafalgar Bicentenary

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to commemorate the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar and the death of Admiral Lord Nelson. [22156]

Mr. Spellar: We have begun to consider how we can commemorate the bicentenary in October 2005. We expect there to be major coverage and are already planning for the current restoration work on HMS Victory to be completed in time for this event, and for Navy days to be held in Portsmouth that year. We would welcome other imaginative proposals to commemorate this significant anniversary.

Trident

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the arming-fusing-firing mechanism for the UK's Trident warhead is wholly owned by the UK. [21823]

Dr. Reid: Yes.

Naval Establishments

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the annual running costs of *(a)* the Royal Naval Armaments Depot, Coulport and *(b)* the Clyde Submarine Base, Faslane. [21207]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from D. J. Stevens to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 22 December 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the running costs of the Royal Naval Armament Depot (RNAD) Coulport and the Clyde Naval Base Faslane as this matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency.

The annual running cost for the financial year 1997/98 for RNAD Coulport is £50.747M and that for the Naval Base, Faslane is £130.659M. These figures are expressed at 97/98 price levels.

Correspondence

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Minister for the Armed Forces will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Salisbury, dated 17 November, to him about the case of Lt. Colonel Keith Pople. [21711]

Dr. Reid: I have today written to the hon. Gentleman.

Christmas Island (DDT Spray)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the quantities of DDT used by British forces remaining on Christmas Island. [20801]

Mr. Spellar: We are aware that diluted DDT was sprayed from the air by British forces on Christmas Island, though the records are very limited. The only recorded quantities are for January, February and April 1959 when nearly 209,000 gallons of diluted spray were used. Typical dilutions were one part DDT per 1,000 parts water.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on health of the use of DDT spray on British service personnel on Christmas Island; [20877]

(2) what arrangements exist to monitor and update the medical records of service personnel who served on Christmas Island. [20802]

Mr. Spellar: Christmas Island provides a rich environment for a variety of insects. In the late 1950s and early 1960s when British troops were stationed there, DDT spraying was used for insect control, as was common practice elsewhere in the world at the time. So far as can be established from available records, my Department has made no particular assessments concerning the use of DDT on Christmas Island. Independent studies covering British Nuclear Test Veterans including Service Personnel who served on Christmas Island by the National Radiological Protection Board have shown, however, that

"participation in the test programme has not had a detectable effect on participants' expectation of life nor on their risk of developing cancer".

We are maintaining a database on the incidence of cancer and cause of death in the test veteran group.

Clapham Deep Shelter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Clapham Deep Shelter still exists. [21398]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for this matter has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked its Chief Executive, Mr. John Locke, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John C. Locke to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 December 1997:

Your question on the above to The Secretary of State for Defence has been passed to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who has asked me to reply.

Seven Deep Tube Shelters are now managed by Property Advisers to the Civil Estate, PACE.

There are three tube shelters at Clapham, they are at Clapham North, Clapham South and Clapham Common. The last two are let for storage, the first is vacant.

PACE are at the moment in the process of disposing of all seven Deep Tube Shelters. We have conducted an informal tender and hope shortly to conclude a sale.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Night Flights (Heathrow)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make

a sttaement on the Government's policy in respect of night flights into Heathrow; and what representations he has received on such flights. [20939]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The policy of successive Governments in setting night restrictions has been to strike a balance between the interests of local people and those of the aviation industry, users and the wider economy. When the current regime of night flying restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted was introduced it was envisaged that it would run until October 1998. The Department has received representations from both sides of the debate in recent months. I intend to publish a consultation paper on the subject early in the New Year.

Radon

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of houses in the Craven District of North Yorkshire which have been made radon proof since the publication of the latest guidance on the subject by his Department. [21106]

Angela Eagle: Within the area covered by Craven District Council, 330 householders have applied to have a measurement under the Government's radon measurement programme and of those 29 have been found to be above the recommended "Action Level".

There is no obligation on householders to inform the Government when they have carried out radon remedial works. My Department does not, therefore, hold statistics concerning the number of owners of existing dwellings who have taken radon remedial action in any given area. However, research indicates that between 11 and 18 per cent. of householders in England as a whole, who have homes above the radon Action Level have so far taken some remedial action.

Building Regulations are used to address potential radon problems in new dwellings. New guidance has been drafted to take into account areas newly identified in May 1996 as being affected by elevated radon levels. The draft guidance sets out both the areas where protective measures to prevent radon entering should apply and what those measures should be. It was subject to a public consultation, which ended in May 1997. The guidance will be issued shortly. Although there are currently no formal requirements to apply radon protective measures to new dwellings Craven, we are aware that they are being adopted on a voluntary basis.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance his Department has issued on the minium safe distance from telecommunications masts for *(a)* houses and *(b)* buildings housing animals in respect of microwave radiation. [21251]

Mr. Raynsford: Guidance on limiting exposure to electromagnetic radiation is issued by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) which has a statutory function to provide advice to Government on all radiation matters. The guidance specifies restrictions on the exposure of people rather than safe distances from equipment. The NRPB advises that radio waves at ground level and in regions accessible to the public and to animals tends to be many times below guideline levels and should present no significant health risk. Telecommunications operators have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Management of the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 to ensure that their work activities, which would include the operation of their apparatus, do not present a risk to employees and the general public.

Railway Lines (Safety)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the number of railway officers visiting schools to educate children on the importance of safety near railway lines has been reduced in the last two years. [21819]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Over the last two years there have been a number of safety campaigns launched by Railtrack, the British Transport Police and the railway companies to educate children and parents on the danger of trespassing on the railway. These include visits to schools by police officers and railway companies, particularly in areas where there is a high incidence of child trespass. Details of the number of officers who visit schools are not collected centrally.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* children and *(b)* adults have been killed on railway lines in each year since 1992. [21818]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is contained in the Chief Inspector of Railways' Annual Report on Railway Safety in Great Britain, copies of which are placed in the Library each year. The figures for the number of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults killed on the railway are reproduced in the following tables.

Fatalities on the railway

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
(A) Children under the age of 16					
Passengers	0	0	0	1	0
Other members of the public	1	1	1	0	0
Trespassers	5	7	6	7	10
Suicides	0	1	0	0	0
Total	6	9	7	8	10
(B) Adults					
Passengers	18	17	17	10	17
Staff including contractors	11	8	9	5	2
Other members of the public	9	15	15	12	6
Trespassers	127	114	113	100	126
Suicides	132	140	135	126	116
Total	297	294	289	266	267

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions staff employed by Virgin Trains have visited schools to educate children about rail safety in the North West. [22061]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is a matter for Virgin Trains.

Housing

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what work his Department is currently carrying out to develop policies to increase the re-use of current housing and other building stock. [21778]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are considering policies in this area in the light of responses to the previous Administration's consultation on household growth issues.

Three specific studies due to report during 1998 will also inform policy development on the re-use and redevelopment of the building stock for housing. These are on conversion, demolition and redevelopment processes and potential; the scope for using floors over shops and vacant shops in London to provide additional housing; and housing and mixed use development in town centres.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken since 1 May, to *(a)* require and *(b)* assist local authorities to carry out and update studies which assess capacity for increasing the amount of housing on previously used land in their areas; what funds his Department provides for studies on this subject; and if he will make a statement. [21771]

Mr. Raynsford: There is no specific requirement on local authorities to undertake such studies. Results from the following research projects commissioned recently or due to be commissioned shortly will assist local authorities to assess the potential for increasing the amount of housing on previously used land. My Department's funding is shown where known.

Government Office region	*Project*	*DETR funding*
Northern	The potential of urban areas in the Northern region to accept new housing development	£15,000
Eastern	Development capacity in the Cambridge area and Suffolk	£15,000 to £20,000
East Midlands	Urban capacity in the East Midlands	£15,000
West Midlands	Environmental impact of increasing household numbers by 10, 20 and 30 per cent. above existing Regional Planning Guidance 11 figures—	
North West Region	To explore urban potential for housing	£20,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	Settlement capacity and regional development options	£20,000
South East	Housing capability in the South East	£25,000
London	Sustainable residential quality in London	£40,000
	Potential large-scale land releases in London	£40,000
	Housing above shops in London	26,500
National	Supply and location of future brownfield sites	

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend planning guidance to encourage a higher proportion of higher density new housing. [21820]

Mr. Raynsford: Current guidance on housing densities is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Notes 3 and 13. Copies of these documents are held in the House of Commons Library. The Government are currently considering all the responses to the last Administration's Green Paper "Household Growth: Where Shall We Live?", some of which raised issues of density, in helping us to decide on the way forward on household growth generally.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to encourage people to *(a)* restore, *(b)* enlarge and *(c)* sub-divide existing homes; and what representations he has received on this issue. [21775]

Mr. Raynsford: We will continue to encourage local authorities to act as strategic enablers in ensuring better use of existing homes in all sectors, tackling under-occupation and bringing empty properties back into use.

Public funding is provided to local authorities and Registered Social Landlords for rehabilitation and conversion of properties. We have taken early action to increase investment in housing through our Capital Receipts Initiative. Nearly £800 million is available to local authorities in England in 1997–98 and 1998–99 under the Initiative, and we expect much of this additional money to be directed towards renovation and improvement of the existing stock.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what increase is forecast in the number of formerly married men and women living alone as owner occupiers in the period 1991 to 2011; and what assumptions are made about their housing requirements and changes in their housing arrangements for the purposes of regional planning guidance for new housing. [21770]

Mr. Raynsford: The 1992-based household projections show that the total number of formerly married men and women living alone is projected to rise by 1.3 million in the period 1991 to 2011. Of these men and women, 1 million are estimated to be divorced or separated, and 0.3 million widowed. The household projections did not distinguish household tenure.

The household projections, which include estimates for a range of different household types, are just one of the factors that must be taken into account by the regional conferences of local authorities in their preparation of Regional Planning Guidance on housing requirements for the Secretary of State. Local planning authorities are required to ensure a reasonable mix and balance of house types and sizes to cater for a range of housing needs.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will release the research report proposing an update to the Index of Local Conditions. [22221]

Mr. Caborn: I am today placing in the Libraries of the House copies of the research report by Professor Robson of Manchester University, together with a note by my Department inviting comments on the proposals to update the Index of Local Conditions.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons his Department's control total for housing for 1997–98 has fallen. [21899]

Mr. Raynsford: Spending plans for housing and construction for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are net of receipts of £500 million and £652 million respectively from the sale of the Housing Corporation's loans portfolio. Within the Department's overall spending ceiling, however, no significant adjustments have been made to planned spending on housing and construction in 1997–98.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect the fall in his Department's control total for housing will have on public housing expenditure in 1997–98. [21898]

Mr. Raynsford: The underlying pattern of spending on housing and construction is slightly distorted because the figures for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are net of receipts from the sale of the Housing Corporation's loans portfolio (£500 million in 1996–97 and a further £652 million in 1997–98). However, it was the recognition of pressing housing need and the impact of sustained cuts in housing resources that prompted this Government's Capital Receipts Initiative. This initiative, the resources for which lie outside the Department's control total, will release an additional £800 million in England in 1997–98 and 1998–99 to support capital spending on housing and housing associated regeneration.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to reduce the number of planning appeals awaiting decision. [21866]

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning will be issuing a policy statement on this and other issues shortly.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning decisions were called in and awaiting decision on 1 December. [21865]

Mr. Raynsford: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Councils (Best Value Pilots)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the representativeness of councils chosen to pilot best value. [21641]

Mr. Raynsford: Over 150 bids to pilot best value were assessed by an Evaluation Panel comprising representatives of local and central government, the Government Offices of the Regions, Trade Unions, the private sector, and the Audit Commission, supported by a research team from the Warwick Business School. The aim of that assessment was to ensure that the pilot programme tested the provisional Best Value framework under a wide variety of different circumstances. The Evaluation Panel's recommendations were accepted in full.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to inform those councils that did not become pilot councils of the progress of best value and of the experiences of pilot councils. [21642]

Mr. Raynsford: A research contract has been let with the Warwick Business School of the University of Warwick to evaluate the Best Value pilot programme and disseminate information flowing from it. Dissemination will include a series of good practice papers on different aspects of the process, as well as a self diagnosis framework and a web site. A series of regular events will also be arranged to bring together the pilots and other authorities so as to enable them to share experience.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if his Department's estimates of the total costs of resolving the millennium compliance problem include costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21567]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *150* and to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) on 18 December 1997, *Official Report,* column *272*. The cost provided included all costs known to date, including those relating to the embedded chip problem.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what millennium compliance problems have occurred to date in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* other public bodies; and if he will make a statement [21566]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions has not experienced any millennium compliance problems to date. However the Department is continuing to monitor the position and put in place procedures to deal with any problems that might occur. One Executive Agency reported identifying a potential problem with an expiry date but this has been solved with a pre-emptive "fix". Information is not maintained centrally on other public bodies.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the total revenue, at 1997 prices, from *(a)* domestic rates in 1989–90, *(b)* the community charge in 1990–91, *(c)* the community charge in 1991–92 and *(d)* the council tax for the latest year for which figures are available. [21774]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	1997–98 prices
Domestic rate yield, gross of rate rebates but net of domestic rate relief grant	
1989–90	13,308
Community charge yield, gross of community charge benefit but net of community charge reduction scheme and community charge grant	
1990–91	14,981
1991–92	8,880
Council tax yield, gross of council tax benefit but net of council tax transitional relief grant	
1997–98	11,226

Joint Enforcement Database

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when the current phase of the Joint Enforcement Database initiative pilot scheme will be completed; [21783]

(2) when later phases of the Joint Enforcement Database initiative pilot scheme will be implemented. [21784]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Joint Enforcement Database Initiative (JEDI) comprises several stages and is still under development.

Stage one, phase one of JEDI commenced with the issue of notebook computers to Vehicle Inspectorate enforcement staff in April 1997. Planning for stage one's other phases has yet to be completed. Stage one, phase two—the first operational system—the provision of enquiry access to the test result database and the ability to input roadside inspection results, is now scheduled for implementation in August 1998. The remaining phases of this stage are likely to be implemented throughout 1999.

The timing of subsequent stages has yet to be decided.

Association of Town Centre Management

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met the Chairman of the Association of Town Centre Management. [21867]

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State has not met the Chairman of the Association of Town Centre Management, but the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning has, and the topic discussed was the progress of town centre management.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* accidents and *(b)* faults have been reported on the West coast main line in each year since 1992. [21671]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I regret that this information is not available in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

There have been a number of changes to regional railway boundaries and routes since 1992. Also, prior to April 1996, some information on "faults" such as wrong side signalling failures and signals passed at danger was voluntarily reported. These figures related only to the overall total and no regional figures were supplied.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations governing the number of people permitted to travel on any one train apply on the West Coast main line, and how they are enforced. [21673]

Ms Glenda Jackson: They are no regulations governing the number of people permitted to travel on any one train on the West Coast main line.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what percentage the incidence of accidents reported on the West Coast main line has changed since privatisation. [21672]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I regret that this information is not available in the form requested. The regime for the reporting of accidents changed on 1 April 1996 with the introduction of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurances Regulation 1995 (RIDDOR 95). In addition, accidents are recorded against relevant Railtrack Zones. The West Coast main line covers several such zones and some of the boundaries have changed since the creation of Railtrack on April 1994.

Heathrow Airport (Aborted Landings)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of aborted landings at Heathrow in each of the last three years. [21893]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number and percentage of missed approaches at Heathrow airport for each of the last three years is as follows:

1995: a total of 446 or 0.20 per cent.;

1996: a total of 526 or 0.24 per cent.; and

1997: (to 30 November) a total of 487 or 0.24 per cent.

Opencast Coal Mines

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his review of opencast coal operations. [22146]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) on 17 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *196*.

Council Tax

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to review the property bands for the council tax to reflect changes in house prices since 1990. [21886]

Mr. Raynsford: Valuations for council tax purposes are currently based on their open market value on 1 April 1991. As part of the review of the local government finance system announced on 25 July 1997, we are considering how we might improve the fairness of the distribution of the council tax burden. This includes the question of whether properties should be revalued and whether any changes should be made to the current structure of the valuation bands. I expect a consultation document to be issued in the New Year before a White Paper is published early next summer.

Railways (Cut Price Tickets)

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what powers he has to stop rail franchise holders abolishing saver, super saver and other cut-price, walk-on tickets. [22372]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the Railways Act 1993 the regulation of fares is a matter for the Franchising Director. Under the present franchise agreements, there is at least one regulated fare between any two points, which must be offered. For medium to long distance journeys this is the Saver ticket, which is regulated by the Franchising Director and must continue to be offered for sale at a price that does not increase above the rate of inflation. From 1999 the cap on these fares will be RPI-minus 1 per cent. However, it is in the operators' commercial interests to offer other discounted tickets to attract additional business when they have capacity available and to make use of that capacity. We are currently conducting a review of the railway industry, which includes the regulation of fares.

Bognor Regis Centre

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will investigate the tendering process undertaken by Arun District Council for the sale of the Bognor Regis Centre to establish *(a)* that the highest tender was accepted and *(b)* that no undue influence was exerted on the council during the tendering process. [22190]

Mr. Raynsford: No. This is a matter for the Council and its external auditor.

Peat Working Group

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the terms of reference and objectives of the Peat Working Group; what is its membership; and if he will make a statement. [22264]

Mr. Raynsford: The terms of reference and objectives of the Peat Working Group are: to advise my Department about current peat extraction and usage having regard to the overall peatland resource in Britain and the place of imports and alternatives, and to the Government's general policies for reconciling the supply of minerals with sustainable development; and to monitor, at a national level, guidance in respect of: development control over existing extraction sites; rehabilitation of existing workings; and future land-use issues affecting peatlands, especially the nature conservation of, and extraction from, lowland peat mires.

The membership of the Peat Working Group is drawn from the following organisations:

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

English Nature

Countryside Council for Wales

Scottish Natural Heritage

Countryside Commission

Planning Officers Society

Forestry Authority

ADAS

Peat Producers Association

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Scottish Office

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chair and secretariat).

Car Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many road-side tests on the quality of motor car exhaust systems have taken place since 1 January. [22181]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Between 1 January and the end of November 1997 the Vehicle Inspectorate conducted 74,916 exhaust emission spot checks on cars at the roadside; 1,299 spot checks were also carried out on the general mechanical condition of cars, which would have included, where possible, a check on the condition of the exhaust system.

Regional Government

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to consult on ways of improving *(a)* the procedures for producing and *(b)* the content of regional planning guidance; and if he will make a statement. [22151]

Mr. Caborn: The Department will be publishing a consultation paper early in the New Year which will set out proposals for improving both the procedures for, and the content of, Regional Planning Guidance.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which English regions have regional chambers in place; for how long each has been established; and whether their boundaries match those of the Government Offices of the Regions. [22153]

Mr. Caborn: Regional chambers of the type envisaged in the Government's White Paper "Building Partnerships for Prosperity" published on 3 December do not yet exist but almost all regions are making progress towards the creation of chambers which includes representatives of all the regional stakeholders.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how long the terms of appointment will be for members of RDA boards. [22148]

Mr. Caborn: The length of appointment will be determined separately for each board member.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the borders of the Government Offices of the Regions to reflect other regional organisations and groups. [22150]

Mr. Caborn: We have no plans to do so at present.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each of the English regions the number of members of RDA boards whom he plans to appoint on the grounds of their expertise in rural affairs. [22154]

Mr. Caborn: Outside London every RDA board will include at least one board member who can contribute a strong rural perspective, and more in regions with larger rural areas.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy to publish *(a)* the remuneration given to members of RDA boards and *(b)* details of allowances which are claimed by board members. [22147]

Mr. Caborn: Details of the remuneration of RDA board members will be published in the Office of Public Service's annual publication "Public Bodies". Such remuneration and also a statement of the total expenses payable to board members—being reimbursements and other expenditure in respect of travelling, subsistence and hospitality—will be published in RDA's annual accounts which will be prepared in accordance with directions issued by the Secretary of State.

Rail Crash (Wrexham)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the causes of the rail crash at Wrexham General Station on 24 April and place copies of the relevant reports in the Library. [21922]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This accident is still under investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Until HSE's investigation is complete, it would not be appropriate to speculate as to the cause of the accident. Information about this accident will be included in HM Chief inspector of Railways Annual Report for 1997–98.

Rail Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to review the terms of reference of the rail regulator in respect of investment by the rolling stock companies; and if he will make a statement. [22155]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are currently reviewing the regulation of the railway industry as a whole, including the rolling stock companies, which are currently outside the scope of the regulation by the Rail Regulator.

Greater London Council (Building)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how long the GLC Island Block remained empty while in public ownership following the abolition of the GLC; and when, and to whom, it was sold. [22236]

Mr. Raynsford: Following the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986, County Hall, including the Island Block, was transferred to the London Residuary Body (LRB) who had a remit to dispose of all such surplus property. The whole of the County Hall site was vacated by late 1990, the Riverside Building was sold in October 1993 and the remainder, including the Island Block, was sold to Frogmore Developments plc on 29 March 1995.

Sellafield

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the consultants who are undertaking the independent assessment of the justification for the Sellafield MOX plant commissioning, ordered by the Environment Agency, will be assessing the potential for diversion of plutonium from the MOX plant and from the MOX fuel as part of their study. [22073]

Angela Eagle: PA Consulting Group did not assess the potential for diversion of plutonium from the MOX plant and from the MOX fuel as part of its study because this was outside the specification of the contract with the Environment Agency.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library the terms of reference provided by the Environment Agency to the consultants who are undertaking the independent assessment of the justification for the Sellafield MOX plant commissioning. [22071]

Angela Eagle: The contract specification for the assessment of BNFL's Economic and Commercial Case for the Sellafield MOX plant is being placed in the Library. The contract with the consultants, PA Consulting Group, was for an independent assessment of the economic and commercial case for the plant. The Environment Agency will use the consultants' report as an input to its own wider consideration of whether commissioning and operation of the plant is justified, for the purpose of determining the application it has received from BNFL.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that the independent assessment of the justification for the Sellafield MOX plant commissioning, ordered by the Environment Agency, will, when completed, be placed in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [22074]

Angela Eagle: The publicly available version of the report produced by PA Consulting Group, which excludes material that the Environment Agency has accepted is commercially sensitive, is being placed in the Library.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information was provided by sources other than BNFL to the consultants who are undertaking the independent assessment ordered by the Environment Agency of the justification for the Sellafield MOX plant commissioning. [22072]

Angela Eagle: PA Consulting Group undertook its own survey of published data, information and statistics relevant to the business environment for MOX fuel, independently of BNFL. The results of this survey are set out in Appendix C of PA Consulting Group's report, copies of which are being placed in the Library.

MOT Tests

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the law which requires MOT testing stations to carry out full re-tests on vehicles re-presented; what assessment he has made of the degree of compliance with this law by testing stations; if he will review the charging and subsidies applied by test centres to re-test customers; and if he will make a statement. [21912]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The law does not require full re-tests in all cases. Testing stations have full instructions about what to do in different cases and the Department's Vehicle Inspectorate monitors compliance with those instructions and disciplinary action is taken where necessary. The maximum fees chargeable for MOT tests are prescribed and are subject to annual review but it is open to testing stations to charge less than the maximum if they wish to do so.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many drivers have been convicted of driving without a road-tax licence since 1 January. [22182]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of people successfully prosecuted for Vehicle Excise Duty evasion since 1 January is 208,950. In addition, a further 246,188 who were reported because their vehicles were apparently untaxed paid out of court settlements in lieu of prosecution.

London Underground

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many serious crimes have been recorded on the London Underground during 1997. [22185]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground Ltd. and the British Transport Police take all crime seriously. For the year December 1996 to November 1997 a total of 12,565 notifiable crimes were recorded on the Underground by the British Transport Police. Key categories in this total include:

	Number
Theft from person (pickpocketing)	6,599
Violent or sexual offences	640
Criminal damage	738
Vehicle offences (LUL car parks)	1,391
Robbery offences	462
Serious disorder	226

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the total funding provided by his Department for improvement of the Northern Line in 1997–98. [22184]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department gives grant to London Transport (LT). The distribution of grant by LT between London Underground Ltd. and its other businesses is an operational matter for LT. The Government are providing a total of £759 million grant to LT in 1997–98, including £58 million carry forward from the previous year. I understand that LT plans to invest some £60 million in the Northern Line this year. This investment will be funded by a combination of government grant and LT's internal resources. In addition GEC Alsthom is providing new trains for the Northern Line under a private finance initiative deal.

Circulars

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review each of his Department circulars issued to local authorities which are still in force; and if he will make a statement. [21708]

Mr. Raynsford: Each circular issued by my Department is kept under review and updated, amended or replaced when necessary. A one-off review of all the Department's circulars currently in force would therefore be inappropriate and, in any case, would not be feasible on resource grounds.

Bridge Strengthening (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department plans to contribute towards the cost of strengthening bridges in Gloucestershire. [21911]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This financial year the Department plans to spend over £4.8 million on motorway and trunk road bridges in Gloucestershire. This is largely for strengthening works, but also includes some upgrading, maintenance and assessment work. The Department is also contributing nearly £1.5 million to Gloucestershire County Council's programme of bridge strengthening and maintenance works on their local roads.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his decision on the future of the national advisory role of the Rural Development Commission. [22149]

Mr. Meacher: As soon as possible.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will issue the housing revenue account subsidy determination for 1998–99. [22476]

Ms Armstrong: My Department has today sent copies of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determination 1998–99, the Item 8 Credit and Item 8 Debit (General) Determination 1998–99 and the General Determination of Administration of Housing Revenue Account Subsidy (No. 2) 1997 to all local housing authorities in England. These Determinations confirm the proposals sent to authorities on 26 November. Copies of the determinations have been placed in the House Library.

Contaminated Land

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for the regulation of contaminated land, pursuant to the recommendations made by the Environment Committee in its Second Report of Session 1996–97 (HC22) on contaminated land and the responses received by his Department to consultation on draft statutory guidance and regulations to be issued under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [22491]

Mr. Meacher: We have now reviewed the primary legislation in Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (inserted by section 57 of the Environment Act 1995), and the package of draft statutory guidance and regulations published for consultation in September and November 1996. This review has been greatly assisted by the detailed recommendations of the Environment Committee in their Second Report, Session 1996–97, as well as by the more than 400 responses received to the consultation exercises.

We have concluded that this package of primary legislation and guidance sets out, in principle, broadly the right framework for the protection of human health and the environment, without imposing unnecessary burdens on homeowners, landowners, developers or industry. However, it is clear that implementation of the legislation would create significant financial burdens for local authorities and for the Environment Agency. These potential burdens are being considered as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process, and the decision on when to bring the regime into force will not be made until that process has been completed. In the meantime other relevant legislation, in particular that dealing with statutory nuisances in Part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and works to deal with water pollution in Part VII of the Water Resources Act 1991, will remain in force.

My Department, together with the Welsh and Scottish Offices, will continue to develop the package of draft guidance and regulations in the light of the Environment Committee's recommendations and the consultation responses. We have identified a number of areas where there would be a need for changes to the detail of the existing drafts, and I have today written to the Chairman of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee explaining the more significant of these, as well as responding more generally to the Committee's report. I have also placed in the Library of the House a list of those individuals and organisations which responded to the consultation exercises last year; reference copies of their responses have been placed in the DETR library.

As well as taking forward work on the development of the main regime for contaminated land, I will also be publishing shortly a consultation paper setting out proposals for a parallel regime dealing with radioactively-contaminated land.

Environment Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council meeting on 16 December, indicating which of the decisions were taken by vote; and whether the council proceedings were held in public. [22127]

Mr. Meacher: I informed the House of the outcome of the Environment Council on 16 December in the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on 18 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *275–76*.

A common position was reached unanimously on a regulation establishing common rules and procedures for the export of certain types of Community waste to certain non-OECD countries. As is normal in all Councils, the proceedings did not take place in public.

Task Force on Cleaner Vehicles

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *288*, if the Minister for the Environment was consulted about the appointment of Mr. Keith Taylor before the appointment was made. [22026]

Mr. Meacher: The membership of the Task Force was a collective decision taken in conjunction with my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in the lead.

Motorway Service Areas

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many public inquiries are currently outstanding on applications for the development of motorway service areas; and what is the estimated cost of these inquiries to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities. [21907]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Four motorway service area planning applications are currently expected to be the subject of public inquiries during 1998. They are as follows: M1 Junction 8/9—Redbourn; M1 Junction 36—Hoyland; M25 Junction 16/17—Warren Farm; and M40 Junction 2—Beaconsfield.

In one further case (M25 Junction 11—Simple Marsh Farm) a public inquiry began in September 1997 but was subsequently adjourned until 1998.

The cost of public inquiries to my Department wil vary widely depending on whether and, if so, to what extent the Highways Agency is required to present evidence on policy or technical issues arising from a particular service area proposal. No central records are kept of the costs of planning inquiries to local planning authorities.

Roads Programme

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations have been made to his Department regarding each scheme which is being considered as part of the Government's review of the roads programme; and in each case how many were *(a)* in support of and *(b)* opposed to the scheme. [22254]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Some 13,000 representations were received in response to the Roads Review consultation exercise, including significant lobbying campaigns in support of some schemes. These representations are being considered, but a detailed analysis in the form requested by my hon. Friend is not available.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19303]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* Since 1 May 1997, my Department has employed two Special Advisers, four Task Force members and two Review Body members. Prior to 1 May 1997, there were two Special Advisers, two Task Force members and one Review Body member. Information on the salary costs to individual departments of Special Advisers is not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned. However, information on the total paybill for Special Advisers across Departments was given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in his answer to the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472-73*. Task Force and Review Body members are individuals other than Departmental officials who may either be paid a salary or fee to work within a specific remit. Many are however unpaid apart from expenses. There was no cost for Task Force members either before 1 May 1997 or since then. Similarly, there was no cost for Review Body members prior to 1 May 1997, but since 1 May fees amounting to £1,026 have been paid.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19966]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* The information is set out in the following table.

Appointments since 1 May 1997

Body	*Appointee*	*Position*	*Whether remunerated (Yes or No)*
Executive NDPBs			
Accounts Commission for Scotland	Mrs. Marcia Campbell	Member	Yes
	Mr. John Mullin	Member	Yes
	Mr. Donald Dewar	Member	Yes
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Mr. Alistair Gray	Member	Yes
	Joan Currie	Member	Yes
	Mr. James Gray	Member	Yes
	Mr. Colin Paterson CBE	Member	Yes
National Museums of Scotland	Mr. Robert H. Smith	Chairman	No
Parole Board for Scotland	Lord Ross	Member	Yes
	Sheriff Brian Lockhart	Member	No
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland	Professor Roland Paxton	Commissioner	No
Scottish Agricultural and Biological Research Institutes			
Rowett Research Institute	Dr. James Stewart	Member	No
Scottish Crop Research Institute	Mr. Andrew C. Bain	Member	No
	Dr. John Sime	Member	No
	Mr. Philip Whitworth	Member	No
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	Mrs. Mary M. McKelvie	Member	Yes
Scottish Community Education Council	Lillias Noble	Member	No
	Mr. Norman MacDonald	Member	No
	Mr. Alan Blackie	Member	No
	Mr. Louie MacAllan	Member	No
	Mr. James Sweeney	Member	No
Scottish Enterprise	Sir Ian Wood	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. Cameron McLatchie CBE	Deputy Chairman	Yes
	Cllr. Keith Geddes	Member	Yes
	Mr. Eric Hagman	Member	Yes
	Janet Lowe	Member	Yes
	Sir Iain Vallance	Member	Yes
Sottish Higher Education Funding Council	Professor Geoffrey Boulton	Member	Yes
	Ann Kettle	Member	Yes
	Dr. Valerie Machle	Member	Yes
	Mr. Stewart Miller	Member	Yes
	Mr. James Wright	Member	Yes

Appointments since 1 May 1997

Body	*Appointee*	*Position*	*Whether remunerated (Yes or No)*
Scottish Homes	Professor Duncan Maclennan	Member	Yes
	Professor John Rankin Small CBE	Member	Yes
	Ms P. Ann D. Clark	Member	Yes
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust	Mr. Simon Miller	Member	No
Scottish Legal Aid Board	Margaret Scanlan	Member	Yes
Scottish Sports Council	Mr. David Arnott	Member	No
	Mrs. Evlyn Raistrick	Member	No
	Mr. John Colquhoun	Member	No
	Mr. Louise Martin	Member	No
Scottish Tourist Board	Mrs. Madeline MacPhail	Member	Yes
Advisory NDPBs			
Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland	Professor Christopher Morris	Member	No
	Mr. Bruce Mackie	Member	No
Children's Panel Advisory Committees	Mr. David M. Carmichael	Member	No
	Mr. James Inch	Member	No
Historic Buildings Council for Scotland	Dr. John Frew	Member	No
	Ms Fiona Sinclair	Member	No
	Mrs. Pamela Robertson	Member	No
Local Government Boundary Commission	Dr. Elspeth Graham	Member	Yes
Police Advisory Board For Scotland	Mrs. Patricia Hayden	Member	No
	Mrs. Margaret Esslemont	member	No
Scottish Crime Prevention Council	Mr. Gordon Ferrie	Member	No
Scottish Economic Council	Mr. Andrew Dewar-Durie	Member	No
	Mrs. Margaret Ford	Member	No
	Mr. Bill A. Furness	Member	No
	Mr. Gus MacDonald	Member	No
	Mr. Yoshikaza Niwa	Member	No
	Mr. Mike R. J. Pacitti	Member	No
	Mr. Mike D. Ross	Member	No
	Mr. Ian M. Russell	Member	No
Scottish Police College Board of Governors	Mr. Ian Snedden	Member	No
Scottish Standing Committee for the Calculation of Residual Values of Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs	Mr. Gavin B. Hill	MemberNo	
Scottish Studentship Selection Committee	Professor D. Harding	Chairman	Yes
	Professor R. Bauckham	Member	Yes
	Professor S. Frith	Member	Yes
	Professor S. Smith	Member	Yes
	Professor B. Murdoch	Member	Yes
	Professor A. Millar	Member	Yes
	Professor T. Devine	Member	Yes
	Professor W. Gordon	Member	Yes
	Professor R. Jack	Member	Yes
	Professor C. Britton	Member	Yes
Scottish Valuation and Rating Council	Mr. Duncan Chisholm	Member	No
	Mr. Thomas Scholes	Member	No
Nationalised Industries			
Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd.	Captain John Simkins	Managing Director	Yes
Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.	Mr. Robert MacLeod	Managing Director	Yes

Appointments since 1 May 1997

Body	*Appointee*	*Position*	*Whether remunerated (Yes or No)*
Public Corporations			
East of Scotland Water Authority	Councillor Robert Cairns	Chairman	Yes
	Robin Bell	Member	Yes
	David Bleiman	Member	Yes
	John Broadfoot	Member	Yes
	Councillor Jeanette Burness	Member	Yes
	Councillor Thomas Dair	Member	Yes
	Councillor Ann Dickson	Member	Yes
North of Scotland Water Authority	Councillor Colin Rennie	Chairman	Yes
	Councillor Joan Easten	Member	Yes
	Nigel Hawkins	Member	Yes
	Andrew Lewis	Member	Yes
	Nicholas McAndrew	Member	Yes
West of Scotland Water Authority	Norman Berry	Member	Yes
	Councillor Gerald Carroll	Member	Yes
	David Gray	Member	Yes
	Jane McKay	Member	Yes
	Councillor David Munn	Member	Yes
NHS Bodies			
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	Dr. Valerie Maehle	Non Executive Director	Yes
Angus NHS Trust	Major John Ingram	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs. Freda Robertson	Non Executive Director	Yes
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	Mr. Anthony Taylor	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Dr. Anthony Watson	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. Graham Garvie	Non Executive Director	Yes
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	Mr. John Rafferty	Chairman	Yes
Dumfries and Galloway Community Services NHS Trust	Professor Rex Taylor	Chairman	Yes
	Dr. Robert Grieve	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. Alexander Scott	Non Executive Director	Yes
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Services NHS Trust	Mrs. Hilary Grieve	Chairman	Yes
	Miss Murray Ritchie	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. William Wilson	Non Executive Director	Yes
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	Mr. John Burrowes	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mrs. Agnes Smith	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Professor Bernard King	Non Executive Director	Yes
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	Mr. Nicholas Parker	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mrs. Jane Garden	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. Robin Burley	Non Executive Director	Yes
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	Mr. Barry Sealey CBE	Chairman	Yes
Edinburgh Sick Children's Hospital NHS Trust	Mr. Graeme Millar	Chairman	Yes
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	Mr. Ian Mullen	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. Campbell Christie	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Rev. John Jenkinson	Non Executive Director	Yes
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	Dr. James Gallagher	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mrs. Annie McGovern	Non Executive Director	Yes
Glasgow Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	Mr. Andrew Robertson OBE	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs. Susan Baird	Non Executive Director	Yes
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	Mr. Ian Laidlaw	Chairman	Yes
	Professor Jean McIntosh	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. Charles Scott	Non Executive Director	Yes
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	Dr. David Campbell	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. Eric Howie	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. Jim O'Donnell	Non Executive Director	Yes

Appointments since 1 May 1997

Body	*Appointee*	*Position*	*Whether remunerated (Yes or No)*
Highland Communities NHS Trust	Mrs. Barbara Bruce	Non Executive Director	Yes
Inverclyde Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	Mr. Allan Robertson	Chairman	Yes
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Mr. Robert Thomson	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. John Devine	Non Executive Director	Yes
Law Hospital NHS Trust	Mr. John Dunbar	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs. Ann Lumsden	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Miss Mary Wootton	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mrs. Susan Aitchison	Non Executive Director	Yes
Monklands and Bellshill NHS Trust	Mrs. Charlotte Henderson	Non Executive Director	Yes
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	Mr. John Mathieson OBE	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs. Christina Grant	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. John Rae	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mrs. Lena Graham	Non Executive Director	Yes
Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline NHS Trust	Mr. David Stobie	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. Frederick Marks OBE	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mrs. Sandra Martin	Non Executive Director	Yes
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Mr. Donald Urquhart	Chairman	Yes
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	Mr. Garth Morrison CBE	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs Angela Dobbie	Non Executive Director	Yes
Scottish Ambulance Service	Mr. Owen Clarke CBE	Chairman	Yes
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	Professor Gordon Wilson	Chairman	Yes
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	Mr. Frank Baillie	Non Executive Director	Yes
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	Mrs. Anne Walker	Non Executive Director	Yes
Stobhill NHS Trust	Mr. Alexander Gaston	Chairman	Yes
	Ms Linda Haase	Non Executive Director	Yes
West Lothian NHS Trust	Mr. Peter Johnston	Non Executive Director	Yes
Western General Hospital NHS Trust	Mr. Michael Walker	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. Henry Fairweather	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. William Stewart	Non Executive Director	Yes
West Glasgow Hospital University NHS Trust	Mr. Ronnie Cleland	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. Ian Irvine	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Mr. Mike Graham	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Lady Ann Calman	Non Executive Director	Yes
	Professor Stan Kaye	Non Executive Director	Yes
Yorkhill NHS Trust	Professor Forrester Cockburn	Chairman	Yes
Argyll and Clyde Health Board	Councillor Owen Taylor	Non Executive Member	Yes
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board	Dr. John Morrow	Chairman	Yes
Borders Health Board	Mr. David Kilshaw	Chairman	Yes
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board	Mr. John Ross CBE	Chairman	Yes
Fife Health Board	Mrs. Charlotte Stenhouse	Chairman	Yes
Forth Valley Health Board	Mr. Euan Bell-Scott	Chairman	Yes
Grampian Health Board	Mrs. Anne Campbell	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Professor James Petrie	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mr. Gordon McLellan	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mrs. Elizabeth Park	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mrs. Morag Morrell	Non Executive Member	Yes

Appointments since 1 May 1997

Body	*Appointee*	*Position*	*Whether remunerated (Yes or No)*
Greater Glasgow Health Board	Professor David Hamblen	Chairman	Yes
Highland Health Board	Mrs. Caroline Thomson	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs. Alison Magee	Non Executive Member	Yes
Lanarkshire Health Board	Mr. Ian Livingstone OBE	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. James Robison	Non-Executive Member	Yes
	Mr. Jack Gallacher	Non Executive Member	Yes
Lothian Health Board	Mrs. Margaret Ford	Chairman	Yes
	Mr. John Campbell	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Professor Charles Vaughan Ruckley	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mr. Brian Cavanagh	Non Executive Member	Yes
Orkney Health Board	Mr. John Leslie	Chairman	Yes
Shetland Health Board	Mr. John Telford	Chairman	Yes
	Dr. Michael Hunter	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mrs. Christina Johnson	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mr. Morgan Goodlad	Non Executive Member	Yes
Tayside Health Board	Mrs. Frances Havenga MBE	Chairman	Yes
	Mrs. Vera Joiner	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mr. Robin Presswood	Non Executive Member	Yes
	Mr. Harry Nicoll	Non Executive Member	Yes

1. Reappointments have been counted as appointments.
2. The list includes some appointments which have been announced but have not yet taken effect.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each person he has appointed since taking office *(a)* the office to which he has appointed them, *(b)* the period of office for which they have each been appointed, *(c)* their political party allegiance and *(d)* the date of appointment. [21290]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Information on *(a)*, *(b)* and *(d)* is available in the latest edition of the Scottish Office publication "Appointments to Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies and NHS Bodies", a copy of which is in the Library. Details of appointments will also appear on The Scottish Office website on the Internet (http://www.scotland.gov.uk) from January 1998.

Information on political party allegiance is not collected centrally.

Graduation Statistics

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people graduated from universities in Scotland in *(a)* arts and humanities, *(b)* science and technology, *(c)* medicine and *(d)* law in (i) 1976, (ii) 1986 and (iii) 1996. [20749]

Mr. Wilson: The available information on graduates from Scottish Higher Education Institutions is given in the following table.

Subject	*1986* [1]*Universities*	*1996* [1]*Universities*	*1996 All Higher Education Institutions*
Arts and Humanities	1,568	4,623	8,057
Social Sciences[2]	1,704	5,624	10,920
Science and Technology	3,342	7,946	14,701
Medicine and Dentistry	806	947	947
Multi-disciplinary	770	4,109	4,993
Unknown	1,389	0	0
Total	9,579	23,249	39,618

[1] Available figures are for the following Universities: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Strathclyde, Aberdeen, Heriot-Watt, Dundee, St. Andrews, and Stirling.
[2] Social Science includes law.
Since 1994–95 data on Higher Education Institutions has been collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Prior to this date, the data came from the University Statistical Record and returns made to SOED by Further Education Colleges and Colleges of Education. Information for 1985–86 is only available for the Universities covered by the University Statistical Record. There is no available data for 1976.

Mature Students

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make arrangements for students aged over 50 years to have access to loans to help them to pay their university or college fees and other costs. [20685]

Mr. Wilson: Under the new student support arrangements for full-time higher education, students aged over 50 will be eligible for means-tested help with tuition fees on the same basis as other students, which means that if they are on low incomes they will continue to receive free tuition.

Under the current student loans scheme, full-time students who are aged 50 or over when their course starts are not eligible for a loan and we do not plan any changes in those arrangements for academic year 1998–99. We will, however, be reviewing the position for future years in the context of the move to 100 per cent. loans for

maintenance. Both full-time and part-time students in higher education will be eligible for Access Funds from academic year 1998–99, regardless of their age.

East Lothian District Council

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the Controller of Audit's Special Report 97/2 on East Lothian District Council was submitted to *(a)* the Accounts Commission and *(b)* East Lothian Council. [20987]

Mr. Macdonald: I understand from the Accounts Commission for Scotland that the Controller of Audit's report was dated 27 August 1997 and was sent to the Accounts Commission and East Lothian Council on that date.

Controller of Audit Reports

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list instances in each of the last five years where the Controller of Audit has made a special report in circumstances where the authority in question had an audit certificate which was unqualified in respect of the matters raised in the report. [21003]

Mr. Macdonald: The Accounts Commission for Scotland have provided the following information:

SR93/2 on Dumbarton District Council: Payments to Anti Poll Tax Organisations

SR97/2 on East Lothian District Council: Payments to a Trust

Section 102 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 gives the statutory function of reporting on the accounts of local authorities to the Controller of Audit. There is no requirement that special reports under section 102 should be restricted to instances where accounts have been qualified. Under section 102(3) the Controller of Audit is obliged to report

"having considered any matter arising out of the auditing under his part of this Act of the accounts of any local authority and having made such further enquiries (if any) as he may think fit."

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public local inquiries conducted by the Accounts Commission arising from special reports by the Controller of Audit for each year since 1992, giving the cost of each inquiry. [20989]

Mr. Macdonald: The Accounts Commission for Scotland has the power to hold hearings under section 103(2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. I understand from them that hearings have been held as follows:

1992: 1—Western Isles Council

1993: 0

1994: 0

1995: 0

1996: 0

1997:1—East Lothian District Council.

The costs of holding hearings are not separately identified. They are part of the overall performance of the Commission's statutory functions, and there have been no additional costs in relation to officers' or members' remuneration.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the special reports by the Controller of Audit submitted to the Accounts Commission in each of the years 1992–93 to 1996–97, giving *(a)* a brief description of each and *(b)* the final decision of the Accounts Commission in each case. [20988]

Mr. Macdonald: The Accounts Commission for Scotland have provided the following information.

Special reports were submitted as follows:

Number	*Date*	*Title*	*Description*	*Decision*
SR93/2	8 October 1993	Dumbarton District Council: Payments to Anti Poll Tax Organisations	Legality of payments to organisations campaigning against poll tax.	No action
SR96/1	10 January 1996	Lothian Regional Council Apportionment of Costs of Collecting Water Tax in 1993–94	£4.8 million debited to the wrong account	The accounts did not present fairly the financial position of the authority and the accounts for 1995–96 should be prepared on a different basis
SR96/2	1 February 1996	Lothian Regional Council Apportionment of Costs of Collecting Water Tax in 1994–95	£3.8 million debited to the wrong account	As above.

In addition, a number of general and public interest reports have been issued over that period.

Meat Retailers

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to require *(a)* supermarkets and *(b)* other retail outlets to notify customers of the country of origin and age of the animals in the case of all fresh and frozen meat sold by them. [21803]

Mr. Macdonald: None but, subject to Parliamentary approval, a voluntary Beef Labelling Scheme will be introduced on 1 April 1998. Retail outlets will not be required to label fresh or frozen beef or veal under the Scheme, but retailers will, with the prior approval of my Department, be able to use labels which give a wide range of information, including information as to the Country of origin, age of the cattle etc. If the information contained on the labels is confined to basic advice such as weight, cut, use by date, then Government approval is not needed.

Set-aside Schemes

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what acreage of *(a)* Scotland and (b) Perthshire is included in set-aside schemes; what is the current cost to public funds of set-aside schemes in *(a)* and *(b)*; and what percentage of land under farming in Scotland is included in set-aside. [21638]

Mr. Macdonald: The area of set-aside claimed in Scotland under the 1997 Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) is 41,049 hectares and represents 4.19 per cent. of the arable land shown in the June 1997 Agriculture Census. Scottish farmers will receive an estimated £11 million in set-aside aid in respect of this claimed area. The AAPS is not administered on a county basis and information is not held in this way.

Orkney and Shetland

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times he has visited Orkney and Shetland since 2 May. [22039]

Mr. Dewar: Since 2 May I have visited Orkney twice. I have not yet visited Shetland.

Beef Export Ban

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the occasions on which the Under-Secretary with responsibility for agriculture has *(a)* attended and *(b)* spoken at meetings of the European Council of Ministers regarding the ban of the export of beef from Scotland. [21646]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture, the Environment and Fisheries in Scotland has attended two Agriculture Councils. He has not spoken on the subject of the ban on the export of beef from Scotland as this did not feature on the agenda for either meeting.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about the UN visit to inspect the Scottish legal system in relation to Lockerbie. [21901]

Mr. Dewar: None.

Training Agencies

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement as to the outcome of his recent discussions with European Commissioner Flynn anent the delayed ESF payments to training agencies and providers in Strathclyde and elsewhere in Scotland. [22066]

Mr. Macdonald: My right hon. Friend met Commissioner Padraig Flynn on 1 December to discuss, among other things, a report completed by a Working Group of Scottish European Structural Funds partnerships on European Social Fund procedures. My right hon. Friend said that the Group had presented a useful commentary on problems which have arisen in relation to ESF funding, and on providing suggested improvements to the ESF system. He was able to confirm that The Scottish Office and Scottish partnerships have already implemented many of the most important recommendations in the report. Nevertheless there are other improvements which it would be helpful to achieve; and my right hon. Friend stressed that it would assist significantly if the Commission's services were able to make changes to their systems to allow funding to be released promptly.

Several of these improvements can only be achieved when the structural funds Regulations are revised for the period after 1999. However, my right hon. Friend asked the Commissioner to take any opportunities available before then to improve the system.

Social Work (Training)

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements will be made in Scotland following the fundamental review of the functions of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. [22471]

Mr. Galbraith: The Government have today published the fundamental review of the functions of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). I and my hon. Friends will be considering in detail the conclusions and recommendations in the report. The report paves the way for the creation of regulatory machinery which would combine regulation of the workforce with the regulation of social work education and training. I have thought carefully about whether it would be appropriate for this machinery to have a UK-wide remit or whether it should be separate and specific to Scotland. I have concluded that, in view of the differences in legislation, the scope of social work services which includes criminal justice social work, existing devolved structures for higher education and vocational training and the considerable support expressed by Scottish respondents to the CCETSW review for separate arrangements, the weight of the argument points towards a separate Scottish body. However, it will be essential, and in the pubic interest, that the regulatory arrangements should be aligned across the UK. I would not want to create a situation where there are significant disparities in standards or practice in relation to registration. Officials across UK departments will work together to ensure harmonious regulatory arrangements across the UK.

This will, of course, require legislation and I intend that legislative proposals should be published in a separate Scottish White Paper in the spring after discussion of the detailed issues within Government and with all the key stakeholders.

I have thought it right to clarify these issues in order to minimise uncertainty and allow sensible planning and preparation for the establishment of a new body. The Scottish Committee of CCETSW and its staff in Scotland will continue to make an important contribution in achieving an appropriately qualified and trained workforce and, alongside other stakeholders, will be able to contribute to discussions leading to the setting up of a new regulatory body. I have asked the Chief Inspector of Social Work Services to commence direct discussions with key stakeholders in the New Year.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that local authorities have greater involvement in the transfer of Scottish Homes stock. [22472]

Mr. Macdonald: On 16 June, the Government announced new arrangements for Scottish Homes stock transfers to ensure that councils are much more directly involved in the transfer process in future. These included proposals to ensure that landlords intending to acquire Scottish Homes stock must be prepared to accept a local authority nominee on to its management committee if that is what the local authority wishes. This arrangements was brought into immediate effect and has been working well.

At the same time, COSLA and Scottish Homes were asked to get together to work arrangements to strengthen the role of local authorities in the assessment of future stock transfer proposals. These bodies have now produced joint guidance which has been issued today to all local authorities. The guidance sets out in detail how councils can be involved in the appraisal process and, depending on the stage which transfers have reached in the process, involves the council in the development local strategies and the appraisal of transfer proposals. These new arrangements will also give councils the opportunity to make their views known before a final decision on any particular transfer is sought.

I welcome and endorse the joint guidance which will allow for constructive liaison and discussion between Scottish Homes, councils and other parties to achieve proposals which have the backing of all concerned. It will also enable councils to satisfy themselves that transfer proposals are aimed at meeting the needs and aspirations of the tenants involved. Tenants' interests are paramount and I would emphasise that the final decision on any particular transfer will lie with the tenants themselves.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the regulation of contaminated land, pursuant to the recommendations made in the Environment Committee's Second Report of Session 1996–97 on contaminated land (HC 22) and the responses received by his Department to consultation on draft statutory guidance and regulations to be issued under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [22475]

Mr. Dewar: We have now reviewed the primary legislation in Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (inserted by section 57 of the Environment Act 1995), and the package of draft statutory guidance and regulations published for consultation in September and November 1996. This review has been greatly assisted by the detailed recommendations of the Environment Committee in their Second Report, Session 1996–97, as well as by the more than 400 responses received to the consultation exercises.

We have concluded that this package of primary legislation and guidance sets out, in principle, broadly the right framework for the protection of human health and the environment, without imposing unnecessary burdens on homeowners, landowners, developers or industry. However, it is clear that implementation of the legislation would create significant financial burdens for local authorities and for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. These potential burdens are being considered as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process, and the decision on when to bring the regime into force cannot be made until that process has been completed. In the meantime, other relevant legislation, in particular that dealing with statutory nuisances in Part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and works to deal with water pollution in Part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, will remain in force.

My Department, together with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Welsh Office, will continue to develop the package of draft guidance and regulations, in the light of the Environment Committee's recommendations and the consultation responses. We have identified a number of areas where there would be a need for changes to the detail of the existing drafts, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has today written to the Chairman of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee explaining the more significant of these, as well as responding more generally to the Committee's report. A list of those individuals and organisations which responded to the consultation exercises last year has been placed in the Library of the House.

As well as taking forward work on the development of the main regime for contaminated land, I will also be publishing shortly a consultation paper setting out proposals for a parallel regime dealing with radioactively-contaminated land.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on her proposals to reform disability benefit. [21006]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to modernising the Social Security system so that it helps people to work as far as they are able; provides appropriate support to those who cannot work; and makes the most effective use of the resources available. We want to encourage people who are disabled, or who have long-term health problems, to play a full part in society and to help them to help themselves wherever that is possible. This means being positive about people's abilities and their capacity, rather than negative about their disabilities and incapacity. And it means getting the right mix of cash and services to people who cannot work, but who need to be enabled to live independently and with dignity.

As part of this process up to £195 million has been made available from the Windfall Tax to test a range of options to help people with long-term health problems or disabilities to move into, or remain in, work. In tandem with this developmental work we are reviewing, as part of our Comprehensive Spending Review, benefits paid to sick and disabled people in order to consider whether the current system meets our objectives and, if not, what changes might be made.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list for each year since 1991–92 the number of claimants of *(a)* disability living allowance (care), *(b)* disability living allowance (mobility) and *(c)* attendance allowance; and for each year what was the total expenditure broken down between benefit payments and administration costs expressed (i) in cash terms and (ii) at September 1997 prices. [22159]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 22 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to respond to your recent parliamentary question asking if she will list for each year since 1991–92 the number of claimants of (a) disability living allowance (care), (b) disability living allowance (mobility) and (c) attendance allowance; and for each year what was the total expenditure broken down between benefit payments and administration costs expressed (i) in cash terms and (ii) at September 1997 prices.

The information regarding admin expenditure is not available in the format requested. The information that is available is detailed in the table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

People claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Mobility Allowance (MobA), and Attendance Allowance (AA)[1]

Thousands

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
DLA care[2]	[3]n/a	590	742	908	1,085	1,249
DLA mobility[2]	[3]n/a	982	1,137	1,308	1,486	1,629
MobA[4]	699	—	—	—	—	—
AA[2]	[5]1,059	890	962	1,046	1,108	1,166

[1] Figures relate to people being paid the benefit and exclude those where payment is suspended.
[2] Source: 5 per cent. data and figures relate to end of February.
[3] Disability Living Allowance was introduced in April 1992.
[4] Source: 100 per cent. data and figures relate to 31 March 1992.
[5] Source: 100 per cent. data with adjustments to reflect the extent to which live cases were overstated. Figures relate to 31 March 1992.

Programme expenditure (Source: Departmental Report)

Cash £ million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
DLA care	[1]n/a	753	1,116	1,309	1,642	1,926
DLA mobility	[1]n/a	1,220	1,656	1,816	2,160	2,435
AA	1,706	1,553	1,795	1,963	2,194	2,421

[1] Disability Living Allowance was introduced in April 1992.

Programme expenditure (Source: Departmental report)

Prices £ million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
DLA care	[1]n/a	853	1,229	1,420	1,733	1,978
DLA mobility	[1]n/a	1,382	1,823	1,969	2,280	2,501
AA	2,014	1,760	1,976	2,128	2,316	2,486

[1] Disability Living Allowance was introduced in April 1992.

Administration costs

£ million

Year	*DLA*	*AA*
1992–93	138.8	74.2
1993–94	142.8	67
1994–95	157.5	72.2
1995–96	152.4	96.5
1996–97	147.2	82.1

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment she has made of the length of time it takes to review cases in which disability living allowance has been withdrawn; [22056]

(2) if she will expedite the review of the case of Mrs. N. L. Underwood of 82 Juniper Road, Christchurch in respect of disability living allowance. [22067]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with further details.

Letter for Peter Mathison to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 22 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning the length of time it takes to review cases in which Disability Living Allowance (DLA) has been withdrawn.

The current Secretary of State targets for clearing DLA review claims are 60 per cent. within 55 working days and 80 per cent. within 75 working days. These targets have been set to take account of the fact that reviews can take time to complete, because the review process frequently involves gathering further information. As at November 1997, the DLA review year to date achievement is 62.41 per cent. in 55 working days and 84.89 per cent. in 75 working days.

Mrs. Underwood of Christchurch was awarded the Highest rate of the Mobility Component from 17.12.93 to 16.12.97. On the 10 October 1997 a completed renewal claim pack was received from Mrs. Underwood. On 29 October 1997, an independent Adjudication Officer (AO) decided that, on the basis of the information provided by Mrs. Underwood, she did not satisfy any of the conditions for an award of the mobility component.

On the 25 November a letter requesting a review was received from Mrs. Underwood which also provided further information. On the 5 December 1997 a report was received from Mrs. Underwood's consultant, Dr. Moran, Department of Rheumatology. On receipt of this further information the papers were passed onto a different AO who re-appraised the case and decided that Mrs. Underwood did satisfy the conditions for an award of the Higher Rate of the Mobility Component from 17 December 1997. Mrs. Underwood was informed of the revised award by telephone on the 18 December 1997.

I hope you find the reply helpful.

Benefits (Peterlee and Seaham Area)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents are in receipt of the lone parent premium in the Peterlee and Seaham Benefits Agency area. [21590]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 22 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many lone parents are in receipt of the lone parent premium in the Peterlee and Seaham Benefits Agency (BA) area.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are collated by BA District Offices. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or specific geographical areas.

The BA's Durham District includes the offices of Durham, Chester-Le-Street, Peterlee, Seaham and Stanley. The number of people in receipt of Income Support (IS) lone parent rate of family premium in the Durham District, as at 30 November 1997, was 9,968. This figure is provisional and maybe subject to change. It should also be noted that this figure does not represent all those lone parents who are on IS, as some who are over pensionable age or who sick may be receiving a higher rate premium, such as a pensioner or disability premium and so do not take up the lone parent rate of family premium.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people in the age bands of *(a)* 30 to 40, *(b)* 40 to 50, *(c)* 50 to 60 and *(d)* 60 to 70 years who are in receipt of disability living allowance in the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency area. [21591]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Cummings, dated 19 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for the number of people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency (BA) area.

The information is based on the postcodes appropriate to the BA offices at Seaham and Peterlee and is shown in the table.

Number of people in receipt of DLA in Seaham and Peterlee BA offices

Age band	*Number*
30–40	1,100
41–50	1,800
51–60	3,000
61–70	3,300

Source:
Figure based on 5 per cent. count of DLA allowance in GB.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she plans to maintain the present establishment of Child Support Agency field officers working from Benefits Agency offices in Elgin, Wick and Inverness; and if she will make a statement. [21842]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

We expect the Child Support Agency to provide an efficient and effective service to all its clients throughout the child support assessment process. We are looking for substantial and sustained operational improvements from the Agency, in particular on getting more maintenance paid, reducing the backlog and improving customer service.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Robert Maclennan, dated 19 December 1997:

In the absence of Mrs. Boardman, the Chief Executive, I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Chid Support Agency field officers working within the Benefits Agency offices in Elgin, Wick and Inverness.

It may be helpful if I explain some of the background to the current situation.

In line with the Government's commitment to modernise service delivery, the Agency has recently conducted a major review of its business to enable it to deliver a service which is more customer focused and more cost effective. Although we are still working on a detailed analysis, it is clear that the size of our field network will significantly reduce over the next three to four years.

The staff who continue to work outside the Agency's Centres will be there to offer a much improved face to face service with our customers where necessary. This will not only support the Agency's business but will allow the Agency to operate improved customer service initiatives within our six Centres. The review has also shown that the Agency needs to improve its interface with and be more accessible to customers.

The Agency is currently reviewing the precise nature of jobs in our field network to ensure that staff who remain there are used in the most cost effective way. This review will also consider the location of field offices. Business Unit Mangers will be consulting and negotiating with staff on an on-going basis to resolve these issues. As yet no decisions have been taken on the future of the three sites mentioned in your question.

I hope this is helpful.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many medical advisers are currently employed by the War Pensions Agency; and what are their function; [21882]

(2) how many regional consultants are currently appointed by the War Pensions Agency. [21883]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is that delivery of service should be simpler and more efficient. Queries on operational matters concerning the War Pensions Agency are for its Acting Chief Executive, Mr. Steven Johnson. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Steve Johnson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 19 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about Medical Advisers and Regional Consultants working for the War Pensions Agency.

There are 33 full time Medical Advisers currently employed by the War Pensions Agency. In addition, the Agency employs a number of Medical Advisers on an hourly, fee paid basis to provide flexibility to deal with fluctuations in workload.

All Medical Advisers are fully qualified medical practitioners who have a broad range of post graduate clinical experience. Most full time Medical Advisers have been recruited from General Practice.

The role of the Medical Adviser is to determine, in accordance with the provisions of article 4 or 5 of the Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983, whether disablement or death is due to service, or whether disablement is aggravated by service, and to give reasons for such decisions. Medical Advisers also determine in accordance with Article 9 of the Order, the degree of disablement due to service.

Where it is established that service factors played a part in the cause or progress of claimed conditions, Medical Advisers provide certificates of entitlement. Medical Advisers then certify percentage assessments of the degree of disablement due to service. The Medical Advisers also provide advice to the Secretary of State regarding eligibility to a range of supplementary allowances, for example in respect of care and mobility needs.

Regarding Regional Consultants, although the War Pensions Agency is the sole user of Regional Consultants, the Agency is not responsible for making appointments. Regional Consultant appointments are made by the Chief Medical Adviser to the Department of Social Security. At present, 412 Regional Consultants have been appointed nationally.

I hope you find this information useful.

Benefit Claimants (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are claiming *(a)* disability benefit and *(b)* lone parent benefit in (i) Coventry and (ii) Coventry, South. [21793]

Mr. Denham: The administration of disability and lone parent benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 22 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people are claiming (a) disability benefit and (b) lone parent benefit in (i) Coventry and (ii) Coventry South.

Information is not available for all relevant benefits in the format requested.

The number of people in receipt of Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is set out below:

	AA	*DLA*
Coventry	6,800	12,000
Coventry South	1,900	3,700

These figures are based on a 5% extract of the caseload at the end of August 1997 rounded to the nearest hundred.

The number of people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) is 9,859 and the number of people in receipt of Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) is 1,914. The figures for IB and SDA are those in receipt at the end of November 1997 and the figures are for the area covered by the Benefits Agency's Coventry District.

The information for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) is not available in the format requested. The nearest breakdown is for the West Midlands. The number in receipt of IIDB for that area is 25,800. This figure is based on a 10% extract of the caseload at the end of March 1996 rounded to the nearest hundred.

The information for lone parent benefits could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

CSA (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total outstanding debt to the CSA from absent parents in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* Coventry, South. [21795]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that children are entitled to the support of both parents. The Child Support scheme is designed to provide levels of maintenance which absent parents can realistically afford.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mick Davison to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 22 December 1997:

In the absence of Mrs. Boardman, the Chief Executive I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about outstanding debt to the Child Support Agency.

I am unable to provide information at precisely the level that you have requested. Information on outstanding debt is available for the 6 Business Units of the Agency which cover Great Britain; Coventry is part of the area covered by the Midlands Business Unit.

At 30 November 1997 the amount of debt remaining to be collected was £130,940,569 for this Business Unit.

I hope this is helpful.

Lone Parents

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals her Department has for measures to protect the welfare of lone parents in those cases where maintenance debt has been considered irrecoverable by the CSA. [21797]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The regular payment of child maintenance is a key part of our strategy for helping lone mothers move off income support and into work. However, there will inevitably be some cases where it proves impossible for the Child Support Agency to collect the arrears of maintenance which are due, particularly where the debt arose through the imposition of punitive interim maintenance assessments designed to secure the absent parent's co-operation. However, a decision not to pursue the debt in an individual case will be made only after all reasonable steps to enforce payment have been taken and after full consideration of all the circumstances of the absent parent, the parent with care and the welfare of the children involved.

Where the parent with care is entitled to income support or family credit her benefit will be assessed on the basis of maintenance in payment, not maintenance due to be paid.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of lone parents are receiving regular payments of child maintenance in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* Coventry, South. [21794]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is not right that so many fathers should seek to avoid paying maintenance. We are determined to ensure that all absent parents meet their responsibility to their children wherever they can afford to do so.

The information is not available in the format requested. The latest information shows that, where full maintenance assessments have been completed for absent parents to pay maintenance through the Child Support Agency, 33 per cent. are paying all the maintenance due, 35 per cent. are partially compliant and 32 per cent. are not complying.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress is being made in conjunction with the Child Support Agency in ensuring that lone parents receive regular maintenance payments. [21796]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are looking closely at all aspects of the work of the Child Support Agency to see where improvements can be made and we aim to bring forward proposals in the first half of next year. In the meantime, we have already announced that an extra £15 million will be invested in the Agency in each of the next two financial years specifically aimed at increasing the amounts of maintenance which are paid.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list for the eight pilot new deal for lone parents schemes from July 1997 to 15 December 1997 how many *(a)* letters were sent out to lone parents, *(b)* lone parents attended interviews or booked interviews, *(c)* lone parents agreed to continue to participate following an interview, *(d)* lone parents found jobs following agreement to participate, *(e)* lone parents failed to respond to the initial letter sent to them and *(f)* lone parents declined to participate following an interview with a personal adviser. [21853]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested as sufficient data to evaluate the results of the New Deal for Lone Parents are not yet available, and conclusions cannot be drawn from early figures. A full report of the New Deal for Lone Parents will be published in 1999.

Information on the operation of the New Deal for Lone Parents is available up to and including 30 November.

As at 30 November 1997, 12,446 first invitations have been issued to lone parents; 4,454 initial interviews have been arranged, of which 3,049 lone parent interviews have taken place; 2,402 lone parents agreed to participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents programme following initial interviews; 864 lone parents have found jobs following agreement to participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents programme.

Information on the number of lone parents who have failed to respond to initial letters is not available from the Management Information Statistics reports kept on New Deal for Lone Parents. However, Personal Advisers will follow up initial letters with further contacts.

Six hundred and forty seven lone parents declined to participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents programme following an interview with a personal adviser.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of a maintenance disregard of *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10, *(c)* £15 and *(d)* £20 for lone parents in receipt of income support in the current year; and what are the projected costs for (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01. [22162]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Child support is a central part of the Government's strategy for helping lone mothers off income support and into work. The estimated costs of a maintenance disregard in income support are set out in the table:

Weekly disregard (£)	*Estimated cost (£ million)*			
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
5	15	55	60	65
10	20	95	100	110
15	30	130	140	150
20	35	150	170	185

1. All costs rounded to the nearest £5 million.
2. The estimated costs for this year are based on an assumed introduction of the disregard at the beginning of January 1998.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total budget of her Department for each year since 1987–88 split between benefit payments and running costs expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* at September 1997 prices and *(c)* as a percentage of total Government expenditure. [22167]

Mr. Field: The information is set out in the tables.

Total budget since 1987–88 in cash terms

Millions[1]

	Benefit expenditure	*Administration*[2]	*Total*
1987–88	46,610	2,372	48,982
1988–89	47,123	2,518	49,641
1989–90	49,592	2,632	52,224
1990–91	53,326	2,450	55,775
1991–92	62,240	2,709	64,949
1992–93	70,771	3,036	73,806
1993–94	77,507	3,257	80,764
1994–95	79,891	3,124	83,015
1995–96	83,291	3,194	86,485
1996–97	87,298	3,378	90,677
1997–98	90,122	3,072	93,194

Notes:
[1] All figures rounded to the nearest million.
[2] Includes Non-DSS Administration Grants for 1987–88 and 1988–89.
Sources:
March 1997 Social Security Departmental Report and earlier equivalents.
The March 1997 Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis.
The July 1997 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Total budget since 1987–88 in real terms (1997–98 prices)

Millions[1]

	Benefit expenditure	*Administration*[2]	*Total*
1987–88	72,153	3,672	75,825
1988–89	68,372	3,653	72,026
1989–90	67,257	3,570	70,826
1990–91	66,963	3,076	70,039
1991–92	73,466	3,198	76,665
1992–93	80,170	3,439	83,609
1993–94	85,322	3,586	88,907
1994–95	86,640	3,388	90,028
1995–96	87,912	3,371	91,284
1996–97	89,656	3,470	93,125
1997–98	90,122	3,072	93,194

Notes:
[1] All figures rounded to the nearest million.
[2] Includes Non-DSS Administration Grants for 1987–88 and 1988–89.
Sources:
March 1997 Social Security Departmental Report and earlier equivalents.
The March 1997 Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis.
The July 1997 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Total budget since 1987–88 as a percentage of total government expenditure

	Benefit expenditure	*Administration*[1]	*Total*
1987–88	27.0	1.4	28.3
1988–89	26.1	1.4	27.5
1989–90	25.0	1.3	26.4
1990–91	24.6	1.1	25.7
1991–92	26.1	1.1	27.2
1992–93	26.9	1.2	28.0
1993–94	28.0	1.2	29.2
1994–95	27.7	1.1	28.8
1995–96	27.8	1.1	28.8
1996–97	28.3	1.1	29.4
1997–98	28.6	1.0	29.6

Notes:
[1] Includes Non-DSS Administration Grants for 1987–88 and 1988–89.
Sources:
March 1997 Social Security Departmental Report and earlier equivalents.
The March 1997 Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis.
The July 1997 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Statutory Maternity Pay

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the savings in the current year from restricting statutory maternity pay to earnings of *(a)* £15,000, *(b)* £20,000, *(c)* £25,000, *(d)* £50,000 and *(e)* £100,000; and what would be the projected savings in (i) 1998–99 and (ii) 1999–2000. [22163]

Mr. Denham: No estimates have been made.

Motability

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received from the Disabled Drivers Association regarding the Motability scheme. [21913]

Mr. Denham: The Disabled Drivers Association (DDA) met my noble Friend the Under-Secretary, Baroness Hollis on 26 November. The DDA raised various motions carried at their Annual General Meetings in 1996 and 1997 relating to the mobility component of Disabled Living Allowance and the Motability Scheme.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to ensure that cold-weather heating cost payments for the elderly will be paid in time to meet the needs of pensioners whose charges are met through pre-payment key meters; what regulations will apply to the payment of cold-weather heating allowances; and if she will make a statement. [21906]

Mr. Denham: Cold Weather Payments will be triggered when the average temperature at specified weather stations has been recorded as, or is forecast to be, 0 degrees centigrade or below over seven consecutive days. People awarded Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance who have a pensioner or disability premium or have a child under the age of five are eligible for help and payments will be made automatically.

In paying Winter Fuel Payments, priority will be given to pensioners receiving Income Support. The precise provisions which will apply will be made known when the regulations are laid.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the *(a)* projected savings and *(b)* actual savings for each year since inception of incapacity benefit; and what are the projected savings in each of the next three years. [22165]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*
Initial savings estimates (September 1993)	415	1,185	1,720	[1]—	[1]—	2,500
Latest available savings estimates (November 1996)	280	790	1,350	1,830	2,190	2,300

Notes:
[1] Initial estimates made in September 1993 were for 1995–96 to 1997–98 and for 2000–01 only. Estimates were not made at this time for 1998–99 and 1999–2000.
1. All figures cash prices except for estimates for 2000–2001 which are at 1996–97 prices.
Source:
DSS.

National Insurance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the amounts of *(a)* employers' national insurance contributions and *(b)* employees' national insurance contributions expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at September 1997 prices and (iii) as a percentage of total Government receipts in each of the last 10 fiscal years. [22164]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table:

Estimated UK National Insurance Contribution Income from employers' and employees' contributions 1987–88 to 1996–97 (i) in cash terms, (ii) at September 1997 prices and (iii) as a percentage of total Government receipts

	(i) UK Contribution income[1] (£ billion)		*(ii) September 1997 prices[2] (£ billion)*		*(iii) Percentage of General Government receipts*	
	Employers' NICs[3]	*Employees' NICs*	*Employers' NICs*	*Employees' NICs*	*Employers' NICs*	*Employees' NICs*
1987–88	15.33	12.89	23.73	19.95	8.7	7.3
1988–89	17.38	14.27	25.22	20.70	9.1	7.4
1989–90	19.63	14.75	26.62	20.00	9.5	7.1
1990–91	21.44	14.62	26.92	18.36	9.8	6.7
1991–92	22.33	15.30	26.36	18.06	10.0	6.9
1992–93	23.21	15.57	26.29	17.64	10.4	7.0
1993–94	24.69	15.54	27.18	17.11	10.7	6.8
1994–95	24.46	18.22	26.53	19.76	9.8	7.3
1995–96	25.49	19.49	26.90	20.57	9.4	7.2
1996–97	26.87	19.97	27.60	20.51	9.4	7.0

[1] Full details of UK contribution income cannot be obtained in the time available. The figures are estimates calculated on the basis of GB contribution income.
[2] GDP deflator used to convert cash prices to 1997–98 prices.
[3] Includes Class 1A National Insurance contributions from 1992–93.

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Child Support Agency expects to reply to the letter of 27 October from the hon. Member for Aylesbury relating to case 1012119700. [21919]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are determined to ensure that the Child Support Agency provides an efficient and effective service to all its customers, including their representatives.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. David Lidington, dated 22 December 1997:

In the absence of Mrs. Boardman, the Chief Executive, I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about a reply from the Child Support Agency to your letter of the 27 October relating to case 1012119700.

The letter was received by the Midlands Business Unit on 30 October and a response was sent by the Business Unit Manager on 11 December. Please accept my apologies as this failed to meet the Departmental standard to reply to MP correspondence within 20 working days.

I hope this is helpful.

Pension Review

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures she will be taking in the course of the Government's pension review to provide a more flexible decade of retirement for pensioners aged 55 to 65 years. [22064]

Mr. Denham: Our pensions review is looking at the central areas of insecurity for elderly people, including all aspects of the basic pension and its value. We received over 2,000 responses to the first part of the review which ended on 31 October, which we are carefully considering. We intend to publish an initial framework for change in the first half of 1998. There will then be a period of further consultation before firm proposals are developed.

Child Benefit

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the receipts generated by taxing child benefit at the top rate. [21587]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I have been asked to reply.

If child benefit were taxed, the yield for 1998–99 from taxing it as part of the father's or lone mother's income would be about £1,400 million. If it were taxed as part of the mother's or lone father's income, the yield would be about £700 million.

TREASURY

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what millennium-related computer problems have occurred to date at *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* the Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [21555]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The Inland Revenue and the Treasury have a rolling programme of work under way to ensure all affected IT systems are Year 2000 compliant. To date no millennium related computer problems have occurred at the Inland Revenue. Two central computer systems at the Treasury have suffered a Year 2000 problem. One system was corrected and a temporary solution is in place for the second pending the planned installation of a compliant version of the software.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his estimate of the costs of resolving the millennium computer problem include the costs relating to the embedded chip problem; and if he will make a statement. [21556]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The managing agents of the Treasury buildings have been instructed to identify those embedded systems that might be affected by the millennium computer

problem and to recommend courses of action. Resource estimates for remedial action will be made on the basis of those recommendations.

Business Profits

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Inland Revenue's practices of permitting some professional businesses to work out their profits for tax purposes on a cash basis. [22436]

Dawn Primarolo: I have today authorised the Inland Revenue to withdraw the practices which permit some professional businesses to pay tax on profits worked out on a specially favourable basis (the "cash" basis). This will level the playing field for all businesses and correct an anomaly for which there is no justification. It is fully in line with the Government's objective of a fair and equitable tax system.

The proposals, which will affect tax due for 1998–99 and later years, are set out in an Inland Revenue Press Release. Comments are invited by 14 February 1998.

Tax Information

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information given in the July 1996 Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs booklet. [22437]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Treasury is today publishing a booklet containing estimates of the effects of various illustrative tax changes on tax revenues in 1998–99 to 2000–01 and preliminary estimates of the costs of the main tax reliefs in 1996–97 and 1997–98. Copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Government Debt and Cash Management

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he plans to transfer the responsibility for Government debt and cash management from the Bank of England to the Treasury. [22438]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Treasury issued a consultation paper on the future of UK Government debt and cash management on 29 July 1997. The Government's response to the consultation exercise is being published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. The Treasury will establish an agency, to be known as the United Kingdom Debt Management Office, which will operate in accordance with an annual published remit but be at arms length from the Treasury for the purpose of day-to-day decision making. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has agreed that this should be a candidate to become a Next Steps Agency.

Government and Business Investment

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of *(a)* business investment and *(b)* Government investment in the United Kingdom. [19158]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Recent developments and prospects for the level of both business and general government investment in the UK were reviewed in Appendix A of the November 1997 Pre-Budget Report (Cm 3804, paragraphs A.34 to A.38).

Savings

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what regulations will apply to new retailers of financial products in respect of the ISA schemes with particular reference to supermarkets; what additional compliance costs will be involved; and who will bear these costs; [21352]

(2) what proposals he has to institute a "cooling off" period for those taking up new ISAs. [21337]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* The regulatory authorities will make proposals on these matters once the form of the ISA has been decided.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what basis he calculated his estimate of the number of people with PEP and TESSA investments in excess of £50,000; [19766]

(2) what estimate his Department had of the number of people with PEP and TESSA investments with a combined value of more than £50,000 when they announced their proposal for individual savings accounts. [19765]

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the total number of individuals who presently hold personal equity plans and tax exempt special savings accounts who will be affected by the new £50,000 limit on individual savings accounts; what margin of error is involved in this estimate; and if he will make a statement. [20398]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The estimate of between 300,000 and 500,000 people with PEP and TESSA investments in excess of £50,000 by April 1999 is based on an interpretation of survey data and information supplied by some major PEP providers. The estimate is necessarily tentative as TESSA and PEP investors are not required to supply the Inland Revenue with any information about their investments, and individual providers would not have information on investments made by their clients with other providers.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on the housing market of the abolition of PEPs and the introduction of individual savings accounts with a maximum holding of £50,000, with particular reference to PEP mortgages; [19767]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people who hold PEP mortgages in excess of £50,000. [19768]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Discussions with major mortgage providers suggest that by April 1999 the vast majority of PEPs used for mortgage purposes would be worth less than £20,000. One major provider of PEP mortgages has stated that £50,000 of equity-linked savings within an ISA over a 25 year period should be sufficient to fund a mortgage of some £125,000. Couples will therefore be able to benefit from an ISA each to cover repayment of a mortgage of up to £250,000. Any effect on the housing market is expected to be negligible.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the basis of what market research he estimated that there would be six million new individual savings account savers. [19770]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: It is hoped that six million people may open new individual savings accounts. This represents the expected number of accounts which could be opened within about three years of their introduction by those who currently do not have a PEP or TESSA. This estimate takes account of an analysis of people with interest from bank and building society accounts which is subject to income tax (i.e. interest on savings held outside of TESSAs) from the Inland Revenue Survey of Personal Incomes.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of extra tax revenue to be raised in each of the first three years after implementing the plans outlined in his consultative document about individual savings accounts. [19705]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The costs of introducing individual savings accounts as set out in the consultative document and are expected to be broadly similar in the first three years to the estimated cost of PEPs and TESSAs, if these schemes were to continue with their current tax reliefs.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the relative average costs of the administration of *(a)* PEPs, *(b)* TESSAs and *(c)* ISAs by their providers. [19675]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* In designing the Individual Savings Account we have sought to replicate so are as possible existing PEP and TESSA procedures, and we intend to keep costs to ISA providers as small as possible.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his estimates of the net revenue yield to the Treasury for each of the years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–000, *(c)* 2000–01, *(d)* 2001–02 and *(e)* 2002–03 of the proposals contained in his recent consultative paper in relation to the introduction of the individual saving account and the associated restrictions relating to the monetary value of personal equity plans and tax exempt special savings accounts which can be transferred into the ISA; and if he will make a statement. [19755]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The costs of introducing individual savings accounts as set out in the consultative document and are expected to be broadly similar in the first three years to the estimated cost of PEPs and TESSAs, if these schemes were to continue with their current tax reliefs. There may be a small effect for 1998–99 if the proposals encourage people to open TESSAs, or some PEP savers whose savings exceed the overall limit of £50,000 choose not to subscribe additional funds.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the policy of the Government in relation to the integration of tax relief on individual savings accounts with that on the proposed stakeholder pensions; and if he will make a statement. [19954]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The individual savings account (ISA) and the stakeholder pension are intended to be different but complementary products. The stakeholder pension involves a commitment to lock money away until retirement, while the ISA gives investors greater access to their money.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the estimated loss of tax relief to the Treasury if all PEP investors were to make the full contributions currently permissible into private pension plans. [21350]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: This information is not available. The estimated cost would depend on the individual circumstances of each PEP investor, and information on the pension provision of PEP holders is not available centrally. Many PEP investors will not be in a position to secure tax relief for contributions as they may be retired or at their contribution limit, and others will be saving for purposes other than retirement income and would wish to have access to their funds.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the current average value of PEP plans into which the full maximum annual instalments have been made since inception. [21349]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Assuming annual growth in line with the Financial Times Actuaries All-Share Index. the current value of the maximum subscription of £82,200 by 1997–98 is estimated at around £150,000, before allowing for the effects of charges and reinvestment of dividends.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay his decision to hold a monthly prize draw for holders of ISAs. [21507]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: A priority for the new individual savings account (ISA) is to increase the attraction of tax free saving to many of those who do not save at the moment. The proposed prize draw is intended to offer people an additional incentive to save through the ISA.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the importance of marketing in support of ISAs. [21506]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Marketing by individual savings account (ISA) providers will clearly be important in encouraging take-up of ISAs, as it is at present with PEPs and TESSAs. The ISA proposals are intended to encourage a diversity of providers such as existing PEP providers, banks and building societies, insurers and friendly societies and retailers such as supermarkets.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the net income to individuals on equity investments up to the maximum permissible annual limit proposed in ISAs based on a current average FT Allshare index yield; and what would be the full taxable amount saved by basic rate saver taking up such a scheme. [21338]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* Assuming the current gross dividend yield of around 3.2 per cent., an individual savings account would provide an annual income of £142 in the first year for every £5,000 invested in UK equities, of which £128 would be paid as net dividends, and £14 as a 10 per cent. tax credit. In addition capital gains will be tax exempt.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of people likely to have more than £50,000 in PEPs and TESSAs on *(a)* 1 April and *(b)* 1 October 1999. [21336]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* It is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 people may have PEP and TESSA investments in excess of £50,000 by April 1999. This estimate is based on an interpretation of survey data and information supplied by some major PEP providers. The number at 1 October will depend on the pattern of transfers into individual savings accounts.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons direct gilt holdings are not to be qualifying investments under the ISA proposals. [21353]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* Under present proposals gilt-edged securities could qualify for inclusion in an individual savings account (ISA) as part of the investments of a UK authorised unit or investment trust or open ended investment company (OEIC). If direct holdings of gilts were eligible they would fall most naturally into the cash component of the ISA. But it must be recognised that gilts are not really designed for small purchases of up to £1,000 a year (the contribution limit for the cash component).

Offshore Assets

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the tax revenue to the Treasury if all assets held offshore by British citizens were taxable under United Kingdom law. [21042]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The information is not available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total money lost to the Exchequer in *(a)* income tax on dividends, *(b)* inheritance tax and *(c)* capital gains tax by the use of offshore trusts in each of the last five years. [21048]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* This information is not available.

Income Tax

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect of *(a)* introducing a 10 pence starting rate of tax on the first £1,000 of taxable income and *(b)* spending the same amount on increasing non-aged personal allowances while holding the top of the 20 pence band at its present level, on individuals with gross weekly income of (i) under £100 per week, (ii) £100 to £149 per week, (iii) £150 to £199 per week and (iv) £200 per week or more. [19033]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* It is estimated that, in 1998–99, introducing a new 10p starting rate on the first £1,000 of taxable income would cost the same as increasing non-aged personal allowances by about £400. Information is not available on the Survey of Personal Incomes on gross weekly income, therefore annual total income has been used instead. Average annual gains are given in the table.

Range of annual total income (£)	*Average annual gains (£)* *New 10 pence rate[1] on first £1,000 of taxable income*	*Increase non aged personal allowances by £400*
0–5,200	50	60
5,200–7,800	90	80
7,800–10,400	100	90
10,400+	100	100

[1]Assuming that the new 10 pence band would apply to all taxable income, so that the rates for savings income would be 10 per cent., twenty per cent. and 40 per cent.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue from subjecting each of the main non-taxed disability benefits to income tax. [19261]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* The estimates requested by the hon. Member, which are published annually in Inland Revenue Statistics are given in the table below for 1998–99:

Benefit	*Yield in a full year from taxing benefit £ million*
Incapacity benefit[1]	400
Disability living allowance	325
Attendance allowance	250
Industrial disablement benefits	80
Severe disablement allowance	25
Disability working allowance	10

[1] Incapacity benefit is exempt from tax for the first 28 weeks of payment, and for claimants previously on Invalidity Benefit.

VAT on Domestic Fuel (Pensioners)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average weekly monetary gain for a pensioner couple in each income decile, and with average expenditure on domestic fuel for the respective decile, for 1998–99, accruing from *(a)* the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel from eight per cent. to five per cent. *(b)* the reduction in the uprating for pensions and other state benefits consequent on the reduction of VAT on fuel from eight per cent. to five per cent. and *(c)* the announcement on 25 November of extra help towards pensioner heating costs. [19271]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The extra help announced by the Chancellor in his pre-budget statement amounts to £50 for pensioner households on income support, and £20 to other pensioner households. These winter fuel payments will be paid both this winter and next. Given the purpose of these payments, it makes little sense to break these figures down into weekly amounts.

For the reduction in VAT, net of the effect on uprating of pensions the average weekly cash gain for married pensioner households, by income decile, is given in the table below:

	VAT reduction from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. net of effect on uprating of pensions	*As a percentage of net household income*
Bottom	0.35	0.20
2	0.25	0.15
3	0.25	0.10
4	0.25	0.10
5	0.25	0.10
6	0.25	0.05
7	0.30	0.10
8	0.40	0.10
9	0.40	0.05
Top	0.60	0.05
Average	0.30	0.10

The information is based on Family Expenditure Survey data, for married pensioner households. The cash figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest 5p, the percentages have been rounded to the nearest 0.05 per cent. Due to rounding the results for the VAT reduction and the effect on pensions may not sum to the figure in the total column.

Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his present estimate of the tax burden as a per cent. of GDP, using total taxes and social security contributions on a national accounts accruals basis, for each year from 1996–97 to 2001–02; what is his estimate of the additional annual taxation in cash terms which is projected to be raised by the Exchequer in 2001–02 as a result of the increase in the tax burden over this period; and if he will make a statement. [19757]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* Projections of the tax burden, assuming unchanged tax policies, were presented in Table B6 of the Pre-Budget Report. The projected increase in the ratio of taxes and social security contributions to GDP from 1996–97 to 2001–02 is equivalent to a total increase in tax receipts of £23 billion at current prices in 2001–02, compared with 1996–97. This is equivalent to an average annual increase of £4½ billion.

The primary aim of the Government's tax policy is to raise sufficient revenue for Government to pay for the services which its policies require, and to service its debt, while keeping the overall burden of tax as low as possible.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* capital gains tax, *(c)* corporation tax, *(d)* inheritance tax and *(e)* VAT paid for each of the last 10 fiscal years expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at September 1997 prices and (iii) as a percentage of general Government receipts. [22160]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Figures in cash terms up to 1995–96 were published in Table 10.25 of Public Finance Trends 1996. Figures for 1996–97 were published in Table S24 of Financial Statistics (October 1997 Edition). Figures for the GDP deflator were published in Table 1.1 of Economic Trends Annual Supplement 1996–97. Forecasts of the GDP deflator were published in Table A3 of the November 1997 Pre-Budget Report.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *658*, on facilitating the use of the Euro, if he will introduce measures to require banks to remove exchange costs between Euro and Sterling. [21094]

Mrs. Liddell: When the euro is introduced in a number of the other EU member states in January 1999 it will be a foreign currency in the UK and will fluctuate in value against sterling. The Government have no plans to require banks to bear the exchange costs that will remain between the euro and sterling in such circumstances. However, the Government will develop with the banking sector a "seal of approval" so that firms and individuals can recognise those banks which offer reliable information and which allow customers to bank in euro at low cost.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the loan from the European Investment Bank to Railtrack for infrastructure improvement will count in the investment taken into account when calculating the percentage of gross national product deficits relating to Economic and Monetary Union convergence requirements; on what criteria this decision is based; and what rate of interest the Exchequer requires for comparable public investment. [21686]

Mr. Darling: A loan made by the European Investment Bank to Railtrack would not affect General Government Financial Deficit (GGFD), Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The calculation of GGFD and GDP when providing data for the assessment or progress against the convergence criteria for Economic and Monetary Union is made in accordance with the European System of Accounts.

For comparable public investment, a return on assets of 8 per cent. in real terms is normally expected on commercial activities by public sector trading bodies.

High Tech Start-ups

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *106*, on finance for high tech start-ups, if he will list the membership of the high level group mentioned in the reply. [22360]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I am sponsoring a group examining the financing of high-technology companies, particularly in the start-up stage. This group is being chaired by Dr. Keith McCulloch, Chief Executive of British Biotech plc. The other members of the Group are as follows:

Dr. Peter Williams—Executive Chairman, Oxford Instruments plc;

Mr. Geoff Lindey—Head of UK Institutional Investment, JP Morgan;

Mr. David Quysner—Managing Director, Abingworth Management Ltd;

Mr. Derek Higgs—Chief Executive, Prudential Portfolio Managers;

Sir David Cooksey—Chairman, Advent Ltd;

Mr. Peter Meinertzhagen—Chairman, ABN Abro Hoare Govett;

Mr. Peter Agar—Deputy Director General, Confederation of British Industry;

Mr. Mike Smith—Head of Business Finance Division, Bank of England;

Dr. Herman Hauser—Director, Amadeus Capital Partners Ltd;

Mr. Richard Regan—Head of Investment Affairs, Association of British Insurers;

Ms Christine Soden—Finance Director, Chiroscience plc;

Mr. Ian Armitage—Mercurey Asset Management Group plc;

Mr. Craig Pickering—Head of Industry Team, HM Treasury;

Dr. Alistair Keddie—Director of Innovation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry.

The group aims to identify barriers that exist in relation to the financing of high technology companies, and has been asked to make practical proposals within six months.

Far East

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the financial crises *(a)* in Japan and *(b)* elsewhere in Asia on prospects for the UK's gross national product growth in 1998; and if he will make a statement. [21103]

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of market turbulence in the Far East on his Department's projections for gross domestic product growth in the United Kingdom over the next three years. [21342]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 17 December 1997]:* The financial crisis in East Asia to date is not expected to have a major impact on the growth of the UK economy. However, the situation is still evolving, and the risk of further deterioration and significant global effects mean that developments need to be kept under close review.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the Government's commitment to provide up to 1.25 billion dollars in financial support to Korea will have on the previously published figures for the public spending reserve for other contingencies which might arise in 1997–98 and 1998–99; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of the provision he has made for the reserve. [21707]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* The UK, together with a number of other countries, has agreed to consider providing further financial support to Korea, of up to $1.25 billion. As the Chancellor announced on 3 December this will be made available only if unanticipated circumstances create the need to supplement resources provided by the International Financial Institutions, while Korea remains in compliance with IMF arrangements. This does not affect the previously published figures for the public spending reserves. Public spending would only be involved if the loan was drawn down by Korea and the Treasury guarantee given to the Bank of England was called in the event of Korean default on repayments.

Alcohol Duty

Mr. Alan Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to equalise the excise duty levied upon sparkling wine, still wine and fortified wine. [21623]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: We have no current plans to change the current duty structure. However, any representations made to do so will be given careful consideration in the run up to the next Budget.

Internal Migration

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what inter-departmental machinery exists to ensure that estimates of future internal migration in the United Kingdom accurately reflect current forecasts of regional employment prospects; and if he will make a statement. [21780]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Tom King, dated 22 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question on estimates of future internal migration.

An inter-departmental National Population Projections Committee advises the Government Actuary's Department about migration flow assumptions between the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom when national population projections are prepared.

When preparing sub-national population projections for England, the ONS consults local and health authorities (through the Department for Environment Transport and the Regions, and the Department of Health respectively) to prepare assumptions about future migration for local areas. The Welsh Office and General Register Office for Scotland consult their respective countries.

For both national and sub-national projections, the migration assumptions for the future are based upon past trends. These will reflect past changes in employment prospects and other factors associated with migration. They will therefore not reflect policy based forecasts of regional employment.

Hotel and Catering Industry

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of people employed in the hotel and catering industry earn less than *(a)* £3, *(b)* £3.50, *(c)* £4, *(d)* £4.50 and *(e)* £5 per hour in (i) London, (ii) the rest of England, (iii) Scotland, (iv) Wales and (v) Northern Ireland. [22089]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Ronnie Fearn, dated 22 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on earnings in the hotel and catering industry.

The available information, from the New Earnings Survey April 1997, is given in the attached table.

NES—April 1997 (UK)

	Percentage of employees earning				
	<£3.00	*<£3.50*	*<£4.00*	*<£4.50*	*<£5.00*
London					
Full-time	4.4	10.9	20.0	29.1	39.2
Part-time	7.4	32.6	51.6	66.8	75.3
Total	5.3	16.9	28.8	39.6	49.2

NES—April 1997 (UK)

	Percentage of employees earning				
	<£3.00	*<£3.50*	*<£4.00*	*<£4.50*	*<£5.00*
Rest of England					
Full-time	5.2	20.5	34.7	47.8	56.3
Part-time	11.4	57.0	75.4	85.8	90.3
Total	8.1	37.5	53.7	65.5	72.2
Scotland					
Full-time	4.7	20.6	39.9	54.4	63.2
Part-time	8.9	59.5	82.7	91.7	94.6
Total	6.3	34.7	55.4	67.9	74.6
Wales					
Full-time	2.4	20.5	43.4	50.6	61.4
Part-time	7.5	62.7	77.6	85.1	92.5
Total	4.7	39.3	58.7	66.0	75.3
Northern Ireland					
Full-time	6.3	23.8	46.0	61.9	65.1
Part-time	3.8	50.0	73.1	84.6	84.6
Total	5.6	31.5	53.9	68.5	70.8

Employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence.
Gross hourly earnings excluding overtime (£) in SIC (1992) H—Hotels and Restaurants.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were employed in the hotel and catering industry at the latest date for which figures are available, broken down into the categories of *(a)* restaurants and cafes, *(b)* pubs and bars, *(c)* nightclubs, *(d)* hotels and *(e)* other tourist accommodation, and the percentage of the total in each category. [22019]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Ronnie Fearn, dated 22 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on employment in the hotel and catering industry.

Information for employees in employment in Great Britain at September 1997 is shown in the attached table. Estimates of employees working in nightclubs cannot be determined separately but are included in the number working in bars.

Employees in Great Britain: September 1997 (Unadjusted)

	SIC92	*Level (000)*	*Percentage of hotels and restaurants*
Hotels and restaurants	55	1,281	—
Hotels	55.1	294	22.9
Camp site and short-stay accommodation	55.2	34	2.7
Restaurants	55.3	345	26.9
Bars	55.4	371	29.0
Canteens and catering	55.5	237	18.5

Source:
ONS (Short-term turnover and employment surveys).

Excise Duties

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of *(a)* tobacco duties, *(b)* alcohol duties, *(c)* petrol duties and *(d)* other excise duties in each of the last 10 fiscal years expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at September 1997 prices and (iii) as a percentage of general Government receipts. [22166]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The figures are as follows:

(i) In cash terms (£ million)

	(a) Tobacco duties	*(b) Alcohol duties*	*(c) Petrol duties*	*(d) Other excise duties*[1]
1987–88	4,767	4,343	5,935	5,395
1988–89	4,990	4,518	6,499	5,923
1989–90	5,035	4,438	6,428	6,213
1990–91	5,636	4,856	6,700	6,624
1991–92	6,290	5,065	8,032	6,985
1992–93	6,041	5,108	8,197	7,477
1993–94	6,518	5,172	8,832	8,768
1994–95	7,388	5,560	9,512	9,848
1995–96	7,291	5,617	10,147	11,149
1996–97	8,039	5,631	10,872	12,316

[1] Other excise duties include vehicle excise duty and all excise duties collected by Customs and Excise, other than those on tobacco, alcohol and petrol.

(ii) Duty receipts at September 1997 prices (£ million)

	(a) Tobacco duties	*(b) Alcohol duties*	*(c) Petrol duties*	*(d) Other excise duties*[1]
1987–88	7,392	6,735	9,204	8,367
1988–89	7,302	6,611	9,510	8,667
1989–90	6,833	6,022	8,724	8,431
1990–91	6,974	6,009	8,661	8,196
1991–92	7,429	5,983	9,489	8,251
1992–93	6,917	5,849	9,386	8,562
1993–94	7,338	5,823	9,944	9,871
1994–95	8,097	6,094	10,424	10,832
1995–96	7,739	5,962	10,771	12,366
1996–97	8,332	5,836	11,267	12,948

[1] Other excise duties include vehicle excise duty and all excise duties collected by Customs and Excise, other than those on tobacco, alcohol and petrol.

(iii) As a proportion of general Government receipts (per cent.)

	(a) Tobacco duties	*(b) Alcohol duties*	*(c) Petrol duties*	*(d) Other excise duties*[1]
1987–88	2.7	2.5	3.4	3.1
1988–89	2.6	2.4	3.4	3.1
1989–90	2.4	2.1	3.1	3.0
1990–91	2.6	2.2	2.7	3.0
1991–92	2.8	2.3	3.6	3.1
1992–93	2.7	2.3	3.7	3.4
1993–94	2.8	2.3	3.8	3.8
1994–95	2.9	2.2	3.8	3.9
1995–96	2.7	2.1	3.7	4.3
1996–97	2.8	2.0	3.8	4.3

[1] Other excise duties include vehicle excise duty and all excise duties collected by Customs and Excise, other than those on tobacco, alcohol and petrol.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *1*, if he will publish the figures for the cyclically adjusted current balance as a percentage of GDP. [21643]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *103–04*.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rendering Effluent

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list those rendering plants in England and Wales currently receiving specified bovine offal and set out for each plant *(a)* the effluent treatment and *(b)* the effluent receiving environment; [20339]

(2) what plans he has for additional controls in respect of the discharge of effluent and its disposal routes; and if he will make a statement. [20340]

Mr. Rooker: Those rendering plants in England and Wales currently receiving specified bovine material are as follows:

Granox Ltd.

Peninsular Protein

J. L. Thomas

Thruxted Mill

Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd.

J. G. Pears

Gilberts Animal by-Products.

Controls on effluent from rendering plants are a matter for the relevant regulatory body—the relevant water services company for discharges to sewers or the Environment Agency for discharges to environmental waters, i.e. rivers. Approvals to process specified bovine material are issued subject to any conditions on control of effluent which the relevant regulatory body may judge necessary in individual circumstances.

Animal Feed

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what circumstances it is permissible to give feed containing animal offal to herbivorous farm animals in the United Kingdom and to sell such feed for export. [20365]

Mr. Rooker: The BSE (No. 2) Order 1996 prohibits the feeding of mammalian protein (including that derived from mammalian offal) to ruminants. It also prohibits the feeding of mammalian meat and bone meal (MMBM) to all farmed livestock (including any equines and fish). This Order also prohibits the sale or supply of ruminant feed containing mammalian protein and livestock feed containing meat and bone meal, and imposes strict controls on the production and sale of feeding stuffs for livestock to ensure that it cannot be contaminated with mammalian meat and bone meal. The export of MMBM is prohibited by the Bovines and Bovine Products (Despatch Prohibition and Production Restriction) Regulations 1997. No export health certification for exports of MMBM was available after the introduction of the export ban on 27 March 1996.

The Specified Bovine Material Order 1997 prohibits the feeding of specified bovine material (SBM) to any creature. It also prohibits the use of SBM in the manufacture of feedingstuffs and the sale of feedingstuffs containing SBM. This legislation will be replaced on 1 Janaury 1998 by the Specified Risk Material Regulations 1997 and the Specified Risk Material Order 1997. There are no such restrictions on the feeding of non-mammalian offal (e.g. poultrymeal or fishmeal) to herbivores, providing it has first been processed to appropriate standards.

There is an exemption from each of these prohibitions to allow the feeding of mammalian protein, mammalian meat and bone meal and specified risk material to animals for research purposes in research establishments licensed for the purpose by a MAFF veterinary inspector.

Beef Sales

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what restrictions will apply in Britain to the sale of British beef which do not apply to imported beef after 1 January 1998. [20361]

Mr. Rooker: The specified Risk Material Order 1997, which comes into force on 1 January 1998, will require imported beef from cattle over 12 months old to be accompanied by a declaration that it does not contain skull (including brain and eyes), tonsils or spinal cord. Imports from Australia and New Zealand will be exempt from this requirement.

Beef from cattle aged six months or over, which have died or been slaughtered in the UK, must not contain head (excluding the tongue), spinal cord, spleen, thymus, tonsil and intestines.

BSE

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the numbers and grades of civil servants, special advisers and other employees and advisors to his Department, who have been *(a)* dismissed and *(b)* reprimanded as a result of their advice or work on the BSE crisis within the Department since 1986. [20488]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 12 December 1997]:* No staff in the core department have been dismissed or reprimanded as a result of their advice or work on the BSE crisis.

Disciplinary matters in the Meat Hygiene Service are a matter for its Chief Executive and I have asked him to write direct.

Letter from Johnstone McNeill to Mr. Paul Keetch, dated 22 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your Parliamentary Question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the number and grades of employees who have been dismissed or reprimanded as a result of their advice or work on the BSE crisis since 1986 has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.

The Meat Hygiene Service was established as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on 1 April 1995. It is responsible for enforcing meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed fresh meat premises in Great Britain.

The MHS is also responsible for enforcing specified bovine material (SBM) controls and other BSE related controls in licensed premises. It does this most rigorously. A comprehensive SBM controls training programme has been provided to all inspection staff. The Agency's staff are fully aware that they may face disciplinary action as a result of any failure to enforce these controls.

To date 48 MHS employees have been subject to disciplinary investigation. The employees are broken down by numbers, grade and disciplinary action as follows:

Disciplinary Action	*Number*	*Grade*
Dismissed	4 (1 reinstated on appeal)	Meat Hygiene Inspectors
Formal disciplinary warnings	21	Official Veterinary Surgeons (2) Meat Hygiene Inspectors (19)
Formal written cautions	23	Official Veterinary Surgeons (5) Meat Hygiene Inspectors (18)

Staff who have faced disciplinary action undergo a retraining programme prior to resuming work at a plant. Such staff are required to repeat the intensive practical plant based SBM training under the supervision of a Principal Official Veterinary Surgeon. The importance of 100% compliance with SBM is reiterated to these staff and they continue to be closely monitored by the plant's OVS to ensure comprehensive and rigorous enforcement of SBM controls.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Health of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the basis of what current scientific advice he has distinguished between the infectivity with regard to BSE of bovine dorsal root ganglia and *(a)* peripheral nervous tissue in muscle adjacent to vertebrae and *(b)* other autonomic nervous system ganglia. [20113]

Mr. Rooker: The advice which SEAC gave me was based on experimental findings of infectivity in the dorsal root ganglion, the spinal cord, the brain, the trigeminal ganglion, the distal ileum and the bone marrow of animals at various stages in the development of BSE after experimental infection. In these experiments infectivity has not so far been detected in a wide range of other tissues including the stellate ganglion, nodose ganglion, sciatic nerve, facial nerve and the phrenic nerve. Other nervous tissues have not been tested in this experiment. The experiment is, however, continuing and SEAC will review the evidence and its guidance in the light of any new results.

Modulation

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on modulation. [21029]

Mr. Rooker: The Government would oppose any Commission proposals to modulate subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy which discriminated against the United Kingdom as a consequence of its farm structure or efficiency.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Health of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average time taken by his Department to make arable area payments to farmers following receipt of final notification to the farmers by the relevant regional office of his Department. [21027]

Mr. Rooker: At present, the average time between notification to the farmer that a payment under the Arable Area Payment Scheme has been authorised, and the despatch of the payment to the farmer, is seven days. The Department expects to make all main payments under the Scheme in England, except those subject to query, by the EU deadline of 31 December 1997.

Risk Management Research Programme

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the findings of his Department's Risk Management Research Programme for the last five years. [21195]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Final reports from all projects, including those in the Risk Management Programme, are lodged in the Department's Library where members of the public have access to them.

Beef on the Bone

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the degree of consensus within SEAC on *(a)* each of the recommendations made and *(b)* other advice given to his Department on bone-in beef; and if he will list the areas of disagreement within SEAC. [20771]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* I have made a statement to the House and published SEAC's advice to me. One member, Dr. Watson, was unable to attend the meeting due to a previous engagement but the advice I have received represented the consensus view of all the members of the Committee who attended the meeting.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the risk of an individual developing new variant CJD from eating beef on the bone sold recently. [20767]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* The risk for an individual eating beef sold in 1997 cannot be calculated with certainty. However, the median value of exposure per person in 1997 has been estimated with 95 per cent. confidence to be about 1 billionth of an ID50 unit. (Where an ID50 unit represents the amount of infectivity, that would cause disease in half the population exposed to that dose.)

Meat and Meat Products

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further measures he is evaluating which would have the effect of restricting consumer choice in respect of meat and meat products. [21196]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 December 1997]:* Our priority is consumer safety and maintenance of public confidence in food. We continue to keep all aspects of food safety under review and will not hesitate to take firm and decisive action where that is necessary to achieve those objectives.

We are reluctant to restrict consumer choice and do so only on safety grounds and factors relating to public confidence in our food supply.

Cattle Traceability Scheme

Sir George Young: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to assist farmers with the start-up costs of the cattle traceability scheme. [21377]

Mr. Rooker: Final decisions on any Government contribution have not yet been taken.

Farm Support

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to provide additional funding for *(a)* lowland farming, *(b)* middle hill farming and *(c)* steep hill farming. [21495]

Mr. Rooker: Any additional funding would have to be provided within the framework of the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy. We are considering what might be appropriate and affordable in the current circumstances. An announcement will be made shortly.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the approximate value of support provided by agricultural support funds of the European Community for *(a)* cereals and *(b)* livestock in the latest year for which figures are available. [21688]

Mr. Rooker: Support in the European Union in 1996 from the Guarantee section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund in respect of cereals was 12.1 billion ecu and for livestock and livestock products was 12.2 billion ecu. In addition these sectors would have benefited from agricultural structural measures (e.g. Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances) part-financed by the Guidance section of the Fund.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much was spent from public funds in support of agriculture in *(a)* 1970–71 and *(b)* 1971–72 in 1996 prices in (i) pounds and (ii) ecus. [21690]

Mr. Rooker: The information is as follows:

	(a) £ million	*(b) mecus*
(i) 1970–71	2,070	2,490
(ii) 1971–72	2,380	2,870

Note:
1996 prices calculated using the Retail Prices Index.
Assumed sterling/ecu exchange is average 1996 conversion rate for agricultural expenditure.
Sources:
Annual Review of Agriculture, 1975.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much farmers in other EU member states received in agri-monetary aid payments in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of this total has been funded by the UK. [21609]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* Nine other Member States have been eligible to pay compensation to their farmers to offset the effects of green rate revaluations since the compensation arrangements were first established in 1995. Since then, payments to farmers have totalled around 720 mecu.

Around 530 mecu of the total so far paid will be reimbursed to Member States from the EU budget, to which the UK—in common with other Member States—contributes. The UK contributes about 15 per cent. to the total EU budget, although the effect of the Fontainebleau abatement means that in practice the UK contributes only about five per cent. to new expenditure in other Member States.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total support for United Kingdom agriculture provided by the funds of the European Community in 1996 in *(a)* pounds and *(b)* ecus. [21689]

Mr. Rooker: Expenditure from the Guarantee section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund in the United Kingdom in 1996 was £2.9 billion (3.5 billion ecu) and a further £78 million (94 million ecu) was paid from the Guidance section of the Fund. Expenditure on UK agriculture was about nine per cent. of the EU total.

Beef Farming

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many beef farmers there were in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland at the most recent date for which figures are available. [21758]

Mr. Rooker: Figures taken from the 1996 June Agricultural Census are shown in the following table.

	Number of beef farms	*Number of beef farmers*[1]
Scotland[2]	15,219	n/a
England	58,921	76,837
Wales[3]	15,478	20,041
Northern Ireland[4]	22,444	26,498

Notes:
Beef farms are those that recorded any beef breeding cattle or fattening cattle (1 year or over) in their Census return. The figures exclude minor holdings.
[1] Farmers are defined as principal farmers, partners and directors for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Figures for Scotland are not available.
[2] Source: SOAEFD.
[3] Source: Welsh Office.
[4] Source: DANI.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much public money was spent to support beef farming in the last year for which figures are available. [21757]

Mr. Rooker: Financial support (both direct and indirect) to beef farming made by the Agriculture Departments and the Intervention Board during the financial year 1996–97 amounted to £2,091.3 million. This was made up as follows:

	£ million
Non-BSE related	
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	278.2
Beef Special Premium Scheme	252.6
Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances[1]	112.0
Other	0.5
Total (Non-BSE related)	643.3
BSE-related	
Intervention	169.7
Export refunds	–0.3
Over Thirty Months Scheme	857.4
Clean Beef Top Up Payments	4.2
Calf Processing Aid Scheme	51.4

	£ million
Beef Stocks Transfer Scheme	50.9
Beef and Beef Products (disposal service)	0.9
Rendering Industry Support	96.1
Slaughter Industry Support	29.9
Animal Feed Disposal Service	0.3
Suckler Cow Special Payments	77.3
Beef Special Premium Special Payments	42.6
Beef Marketing Payment Scheme	58.2
Other Measures	9.4
Total (BSE-related)	1,448

[1] Financial year expenditure not available. This figure is for the 1997 Scheme year expenditure.

Cereals

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response his Department has *(a)* made and *(b)* plans to make to representatives from the National Institute of Agricultural Botany about the funding of complimentary national list trials for cereals. [21682]

Mr. Rooker: Ministers have agreed that Government funding of complementary trials in support of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) Recommended List should cease with effect from 1 April 1998, and the Department's officials have so informed NIAB.

My Noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has also written to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) explaining the position more fully and has offered to meet her and representatives from NIAB to listen to their views.

Imported Meat

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are in place to ensure that imported meats meet United Kingdom health standards, with particular reference to the provisions relating to deboning. [21685]

Mr. Rooker: All fresh meat produced in the UK, and imported into the UK from other EU Member States, must be produced in accordance with harmonised Community rules laid down in Council Directive 64/433/EEC. Fresh meat imported from third countries must come only from approved establishments in countries which are authorised by the European Commission to export to the Community. These controls are designed to ensure that the meat satisfies health requirements equivalent to those applying within the Community.

From 16 December 1997, imported bone-in beef will, under the Beef Bones Regulations 1997, be subject to the same rules as beef produced in the UK.

EU Deficiency Payments

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will propose to the European Commission a system of deficiency payments for staple marketable crops and livestock produced in areas of climatic disadvantage. [21687]

Mr. Rooker: No. I consider the CAP should be reformed so that EU farmers are more exposed to market signals, the overall cost of the policy is reduced and payments to farmers decoupled from production and targeted towards specific environmental and structural goals. A system of deficiency payments would not be consistent with these objectives.

Beef Prices

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the average price of beef *(a)* on the world market and *(b)* in the United Kingdom in each quarter of each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [21759]

Mr. Rooker: There is no unique measure of the world price for beef. The information in the table is indicative of general trends in recent years.

The Government consider that reform of the beef regime of the Common Agricultural Policy is essential. A necessary element in this reform is a reduction in the support price for beef as recently suggested by the European Commission as part of the Agenda 2000 package.

Pence per kg deadweight	*Argentina FOB beef export price*	*Average steer price in Great Britain*[1]
1992 Q1	105	197
Q2	101	199
Q3	105	202
Q4	141	203
1993 Q1	136	224
Q2	125	247
Q3	138	237
Q4	134	219
1994 Q1	133	224
Q2	126	231
Q3	120	216
Q4	124	216
1995 Q1	120	221
Q2	120	224
Q3	122	226
Q4	129	232
1996 Q1	122	219
Q2	114	186
Q3	112	179
Q4	111	188
1997 Q1	109	189
Q2	112	169
Q3	n/a	184

Notes:
n/a=not available.
[1] Prices for Great Britain have been used as these are published on a broadly comparable basis to the Argentina export price.
Source:
Meat and Livestock Commission.

Beef

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to encourage the procurement of British beef for *(a)* those serving in the Armed Forces, *(b)* hospital patients and *(c)* children taking school meals. [21923]

Mr. Rooker: Government Departments and Local Authorities are generally required to look for the best value for money in their procurement decisions, and we would contravene the Treaty of Rome by operating a "Buy British" Policy.

In addition, the Department is neither well placed nor sufficiently resourced to lobby the Local Authorities directly about the procurement of beef.

Whaling

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the scientific purposes which have been accepted by the IWC as reasons for the hunting of whales. [21655]

Mr. Morley: Under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (the IWC's parent convention) a contracting party may issue special permits allowing its nationals to kill whales for purposes of scientific research. The IWC has no power to regulate the issue of special permits. However, in a resolution adopted in 1995, the IWC recommended that scientific research involving the killing of cetaceans should be permitted only in exceptional circumstances where the questions address critically important issues which cannot be answered by the analysis of existing data and/or use of non-lethal research techniques. At its meeting in Monaco in October this year, the IWC adopted a further resolution affirming that in its view current Japanese special permit whaling does not address critically important research needs. This criticism was supported by the UK.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response the Government have made to the recent statement by the Irish Government with regard to the lifting of the world-wide moratorium on commercial whaling. [21630]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) on 28 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *789*.

Fishing Quotas

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the extent to which *(a)* the Norwegians and *(b)* the Japanese are exceeding their scientific quota catch. [21631]

Mr. Morley: Only Japan currently issues special permits for scientific whaling. In 1997 the Japanese Government authorised the killing for research purposes of 440 minke whales in the Southern Ocean and 100 in the North Pacific; it reported to the IWC that 440 were actually killed in the Southern Ocean and 77 in the North Pacific.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated financial loss caused by fraud within each EU state, in respect of the Common Agricultural Policy. [21887]

Mr. Rooker: Undetected fraud cannot, by definition, be measured and, for this reason, neither the Commission nor the European Court of Auditors has provided an estimate of the level of fraud within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Member states are, however, required to report detected CAP irregularities over 4,000 ecu (1996 = £3,395) to the Commission. In this context, the definition of irregularity includes all overclaims, negligence or fraud. In 1996, member states reported 1944 cases of irregularity valued at £169 million—0.5 per cent. of the CAP budget of £32.5 billion. A breakdown by Member State was shown in the Commission's Annual Report: "Protecting the Community's Financial Interests: The fight against fraud" and is provided in the table:

EAGGF—Guarantee expenditure irregularities communicated in 1996 (Regulation (EEC) 595/91)

Member state	*Number of cases*	*Amounts in ECU*	*Amount in £*[1]
Belgium	22	2,439,279	2,025,968
Denmark	40	553,498	459,713
Germany	479	25,504,762	21,183,235
Greece	196	1,361,106	1,130,480
Spain	122	16,487,337	13,693,723
France	76	5,096,471	4,232,925
Ireland	30	7,383,760	6,132,656
Italy	476	123,503,793	102,577,310
Luxembourg	0	0	0
Netherlands	128	10,130,519	8,414,004
Austria	14	0	0
Portugal	53	7,045,267	5,851,517
Finland	5	106,969	88,844
Sweden	58	21,390	17,765
United Kingdom	245	4,157,736	3,453,249
Totals	1,944	203,791,887	169,261,389

[1] Exchange rate of 1 ECU = £0.83056.

Meat Labelling

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the existing regulations on the labelling of meat with the country of origin as they relate to *(a)* the country where the animal was produced, *(b)* the country where the animal was slaughtered and *(c)* the country where the carcase was cut. [22075]

Mr. Rooker: There are no specific requirements for this information to be given on food labels.

The Food Labelling Regulations 1996 contain general provisions requiring the place of origin to be given, if omitting it could mislead the purchaser about the true origin of a food.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's mechanisms for reviewing policy in respect of genetically engineered crops. [21788]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has a number of mechanisms for reviewing policy in this area. We seek a wide range of views through informal meetings with consumer, environmental and industry groups, well-publicised public consultations and discussions and workshops attended by invited scientific experts. We also obtain expert advice from our own independent scientific

advisory committees and through cross-membership of these committees with those advising the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Fisheries Council

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 18 and 19 December; and if he will make a statement. [22179]

Mr. Morley: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Fisheries Council in Brussels on 18–19 December, together with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with Ireland voting against, the total allowable catches and quotas to apply in 1998 in Community waters.

Throughout the negotiations, I stressed the need to be guided by the advice of the scientists and to be cautious in our management of fish stocks while at the same time taking account of the practical realities and economic needs of fishermen. I believe that the final package struck that balance.

In order to conserve stocks, TACs were reduced where necessary. In other cases, where the state of stocks justified it, TACs were increased. At the end of the negotiations, the total UK quotas agreed for the stocks of most importance to our fishermen were some 26,000 tonnes higher in cod equivalent terms than the quotas being discussed at the start of the negotiations. This increase is worth approximately £11 million to the industry and means our total quotas in cod equivalent terms for these stocks are five per cent. above the 1997 level. Higher quotas for some stocks combined with the fleet reductions which have been taking place should increase the profitability of our fishermen.

I invoked the Hague Preference on all stocks where it was necessary to do so.

I am very pleased to say that the agreement included a new TAC for sandeels and new allocations for five other North Sea stocks. These new controls will limit uptake in some sensitive fisheries and their establishment represents a significant advance in conservation. Moreover, I secured changes which greatly improved the UK's share of the TACs for North Sea sprat and herring by-catches.

As well as for the first time introducing a catch limit on sandeels in the North Sea, the Council agreed further restrictions on industrial fisheries by reducing the TAC set for herring by-catches in industrial fisheries.

The Council did not agree the new North Sea TACs proposed for anglerfish, megrim, turbot, mixed flatfish, and skates and rays. It did, however, make a commitment to reach agreement on these TACs by 30 March 1998 and, in order to avoid irresponsible fishing, the Council and Commission agreed our suggestion that no fish caught after 1 January 1998 will count towards track records under the new TACs.

Within the package, there was agreement to the allocation of the Western waters horse mackerel TAC in which I secured an increase in the UK's share from 8.28 per cent. to 9.81 per cent.

I also succeeded in securing an increase to 22.9 per cent. as the United Kingdom's share of the TAC for Atlanto-Scandian herring. This will replace the 19.85 per cent. share imposed on the UK at the April Fisheries Council.

The Council agreed unanimously to access and quota arrangements for 1998 with neighbouring non-Member States. Declines in the stocks managed by Norway mean that Community and UK fishing opportunities have been reduced at North Norway. We have, however, retained our quotas in Faroese, Greenland and Iceland waters at the same levels as in 1997.

The Council also agreed unanimously to the allocation of the Community's 1998 quotas in the waters covered by the North-West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation, together with technical conservation and control measures applicable to those waters, and to the allocation of the Community's redfish quota in the waters covered by the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, together with management measures for those waters.

In order to implement commitments made in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the Council agreed unanimously to the introduction of TACs for bluefin tuna and swordfish.

The Commission presented a paper reviewing the marketing of fisheries products which will be discussed during the UK Presidency next year.

Fishing Industry

Ms Ryan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's objectives for the multi-annual guidance programme (MAGP IV) now adopted by the European Commission and announced on 17 December. [22478]

Mr. Morley: The Commission announced on 17 December that it had adopted the objectives for all 13 maritime Member States, details of which are to be published shortly in a series of Commission Decisions addressed to the Member States concerned.

The full table applying to the United Kingdom which we expect to appear in the Official Journal is reproduced as follows:

United Kingdom: Decision on MAGP IV

Stocks	Segment	Fishery	Catch composition (per cent.)	Pilot rate (per cent.)	Weighted reduction (per cent.)	Situation 1 January 1997 GT	Situation 1 January 1997 kW	Objective 31 December 1996 GT	Objective 31 December 1996 kW	Objective 31 December 1996 GT x t ('000)	Objective 31 December 1996 kW x t ('000)	Objective 31 December 2001 GT	Objective 31 December 2001 kW	Objective 31 December 2001 GT x t ('000)	Objective 31 December 2001 kW x t ('000)
	Small scale coastal <10 metres	—	—	—	—	20,120	286,367	21,901	286,154	—	—	21,901	286,154	—	—
	Sub total					20,120	286,367	21,901	286,154	—	—	21,901	286,154		

United Kingdom: Decision on MAGP IV

Stocks	Segment	Fishery	Catch composition (per cent.)	Pilot rate (per cent.)	Weighted reduction (per cent.)	Situation 1 January 1997 GT[1]	Situation 1 January 1997 kW	Objective 31 December 1996 GT[1]	Objective 31 December 1996 kW	GT[1] x 1 ('000)	kW x 1 ('000)	Objective 31 December 2001 GT[1]	Objective 31 December 2001 kW	GT[1] x 1 ('000)	kW x 1 ('000)
EU waters															
Palegic	Palagic trawl and Purse seines	North Sea Herring IV,VIId	DR: 69 OF: 3 Others: 28	30	21.8	—	—	—	—	1,660	3,841	—	—	1,301	3,009
		Western palagic Vb,VI, VII ex VIId VIII	DR:0 OF: 65 Others: 35	20	13.0	—	—	—	—	4,981	11,524	—	—	4,334	10,028
		External waters (Atlanto-scandian herring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	—	—	[2]570	[2]1,036
		Blue whiting IV, VI, VII,VIII				—	—	—	—	0	0	—	—	[2]460	[2]644
Segment totals[3]						37,453	71,876	34,876	82,168	6,641	15,365	34,876	82,168	6,665	14,717
EU waters															
Flatfish	Beam trawl	Flatfish IV	DR: 63 OF: 1 Others: 36	30	19.2	—	—	—	3,988	15,529	—	—	—	3,221	12,542
		Flatfish VII, VI	DR: 11 OF: 17 Others: 71	30	8.0	—	—	—	—	2,092	7,234	—	—	1,917	6,631
Segment totals[4]						28,240	117,616	26,062	103,054	6,080	22,763	26,062	103,054	5,138	19,173
EU waters															
Demersal	Demersal trawls seines, Nephrops	Demersal IV, Vb, VI, VII, VIII	DR: 18 OF: 29 Others: 53	30	14.2	116,581	400,127	120,630	422,876	29,119	98,210	120,630	422,876	24,993	84,294
EU waters															
Demersal and pelagic	Lines and nets		DR: 15 OF: 13 Other: 72	30	8.3	16,431	51,977	15,854	67,364	—	—	14,538	61,744	—	—
Shellfish (and demersal)	Shellfish fixed		DR: 1 OF: 0 Others: 99	25	0.4	6,413	44,463	6,267	35,895	—	—	6,242	35,768	—	—
EU waters															
Shellfish (and demersal)	Shellfish mobile		DR: 1 OF: 1 Other: 97	25	0.6	11,766	55,648	11,615	51,232	—	—	11,552	50,958	—	—
EU waters															
Demersal	Distant water	EU waters[5]	DR: 5 OF: 21 Others: 74	30	7.9	11,980	19,721	11,296	18,062	2,899	4,510	11,296	18,062	2,670	4,154
International waters															
		External waters[6]	DR: 5 OF: 0 Others: 100			5,458	7,133	3,587	5,679	—	—	3,587	5,679	—	—
		Sub total				234,322	768,561	230,187	786,330	—	—	228,783	780,309	—	—
		Total				254,442	1,054,928	252,088	1,072,484	—	—	250,684	1,066,463	—	—

DR = Depletion risk.

OF = Overfished.

[1] Includes estimated GT values in accordance with article 4 of the present Decision. The objectives will be revised as real GT values become available.

[2] The objectives for 2001 for these fisheries are based on the levels of effort in 1996 and 1997. These objectives are subject to review in the light of the development of the fisheries.

[3] The capacity objectives for 1996 have been increased by 2,108 GT, representing 45 per cent. of the backlog from the MAGP III.

[4] The capacity objectives for 1996 have been increased by 1,782 GT and 11,914 kW, representing 45 per cent. of the backlog from the MAGP III.

[5] Vessels fishing at least half the time in external waters. The capacity objectives for 1996 have been increased by 560 GT and 1,357 kW, representing 45 per cent. of the backlog from the MAGP III.

[6] Vessels fishing exclusively outside EU waters. The objectives for this fishery are provisional and may be revised within the provisions of Article 8 of Council Decision 97/413/EC.

The figures do not take account of the expected take up of decommissioning grants under the 1997 Scheme, nor of other changes in the fleet register since the end of 1996, notably in the pelagic segment. When allowance is made for these factors, the effective reductions now required to meet the MAGP IV objectives are currently estimated as follows:

Estimated rates of reduction required to implement the UK's objectives for MAGP in the light of the current UK fleet position and projected take up of 1997 decommissioning scheme

Segment	*Fishery*	*Estimated capacity/activity reduction*
Pelagic trawls and purse seines	North Sea herring	36 per cent. effort reduction
	Western pelagic	29 per cent. effort reduction
	Atlanto-Scandian herring	Effort not to exceed 1996 level
	Blue whiting	Effort not to exceed 1997 level
Beam trawl	North Sea	19 per cent. effort reduction
	Area VII	8 per cent. effort reduction
Demersal and nephrop trawls and seines	—	Monitor and maintain effort within recent levels
Lines and nets	—	Reduce fleet tonnage by 7 per cent.
Shellfish mobile gears	—	Tonnage objective already met.
Shellfish fixed gears	—	Tonnage objective already met.
Distant water fleet	Mixed External and EU waters (over 50 per cent. non-EU)	Tonnage objective already met.
	Non-EU waters only	Maintain capacity in line with fishing opportunities
Small scale coastal under 10 metres	—	Tonnage objective already met

BSE and nvCJD

Ms Ryan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government will institute an inquiry into bovine spongiform encephalopathy and new variant CJD; and if he will make a statement. [22477]

Dr. John Cunningham: Since the announcement by the then Secretary of State for Health and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in this House on 20 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns 375–96 of the probable link with a new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, there have been many calls for a public inquiry into Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. These calls come from consumer opinion and from the scientifc community, as well as from the families of nvCJD patients, for whom the Government have the deepest sympathy. Comparisons have been drawn with the full investigations which follow transport accidents and major commercial failures affecting the public, whose human and economic implications are often much less.

Further to the statement I made earlier today the Government have decided to invite Lord Justice Phillips to carry out a non-statutory inquiry with the following terms of reference:

"To establish and review the history of the emergence and identification of BSE and nvCJD in the United Kingdom, and of the action taken in response to it up to 20 March 1996; to reach conclusions on the adequacy of that respnse, taking account of the state of knowledge at the time; and to report on these matters by 31 December 1998 to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland."

In carrying out the inquiry, Lord Justice Phillips will be supported by a scientific assessor and by an assessor experienced in public administration.

This will be a non-statutory inquiry, whose main purpose is to establish facts and the respective roles of a range of commercial players and public authorities, not to lay blame at the feet of individuals. The Government urge all concerned to co-operate fully with the inquiry; and will of course expect serving and retired public officials to do so.

The inquiry will begin its work early in January. Parties wishing to make representations to the inquiry can write to them at 3 Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HH.

EU Contributions

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, for each of the years since the singing of the Fontainebleau Agreement, the amount that the United Kingdom has saved in contributions to the EU arising from the terms of the treaty. [22152]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I have been asked to reply.

The following table sets out the information requested for the period 1985–86 to 1996–97, the last full financial year for which outturn information is available.

	£ million
1985–86	823
1986–87	1,343
1987–88	1,137
1988–89	1,600
1989–90	1,317
1990–91	1,838
1991–92	2,428
1992–93	1,993
1993–94	2,350
1994–95	1,648
1995–96	1,576
1996–97	2,418

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve training and educational opportunities for seasonally unemployed individuals who do not qualify for the New Deal programme. [21318]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Department of Education and Employment is currently considering the future pattern of education and training for unemployed people as part of its Comprehensive Spending Review.

A history of seasonal work does not, of itself, indicate a need for intensive help such as training. The Government's Welfare to Work programmes, on the other hand, are particularly intended to help those who face most disadvantage in returning to work.

There are, however, many other sources of help on which seasonally unemployed people, who do not qualify for Welfare to Work programmes can draw. All unemployed people have access to the help and advice of the Employment Service from day one of unemployment, including the job broking service and advice on seeking employment. After three months, unemployed people are given help to broaden their job search through, for example, interviews with employment advisers and job search plus courses. Help with travelling to interviews can also be given at this stage.

In addition, many flexible learning opportunities exist for people who are subject to seasonal or irregular employment, for example through part-time opportunities in further education colleges. TECs may make provision for training and enterprise measures to suit local circumstances, such as seasonal unemployment. Unemployed seasonal workers are subject to the same Jobseeker's Allowances (JSA) rules on education and training as other unemployed people, and can therefore study part-time as long as they remain available for and actively seeking work.

Domestic Workers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the types of employment for which overseas domestic workers can seek employment within the United Kingdom. [21381]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Work permits are not approved for overseas domestic workers. Overseas domestic workers, other than the domestic staff of diplomatic missions, can be allowed entry to accompany their employer under a concession outside the Immigration Rules for which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has responsibility. They do not have the right to change their employment.

English Literature Examination Results

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish an analysis of grades achieved in English Literature in 1997 examinations including a breakdown of each English examining board's modular results. [21596]

Dr. Howells: The information requested in respect of GCE A levels is shown in the following table.

GCE A Level entries in English literature by students in England in 1996–97

	AEB	*OCEAC*	*EDEXCEL*	*NEAB*	*Total*
All courses					
Grade A	3,466	2,152	1,617	1,922	9,157
Grade B	3,878	3,304	2,215	1,849	11,246
Grade C	4,985	3,361	2,247	2,308	12,901
Grade D	5,197	2,381	1,719	2,181	11,478
Grade E	3,762	971	874	1,473	7,080
Grade N	1,186	205	287	559	2,237
Unclassified	531	128	204	287	1,150
Total courses	23,005	12,502	9,163	10,579	55,249
Modular courses					
Grade A	—	1,514	1,617	—	3,131
Grade B	—	2,455	2,215	—	4,670
Grade C	—	2,405	2,247	—	4,652
Grade D	—	1,452	1,719	—	3,171
Grade E	—	435	874	—	1,309
Grade N	—	51	287	—	338
Unclassified	—	85	204	—	289
Total modular	—	8,397	9,163	—	17,560

Key:
AEB: Associated Examining Board.
OCEAC: Oxford and Cambridge Examinations and Assessment Board.
EDEXCEL: Education in Excellence.
NEAB: Northern Examinations and Assessment Board.
Grades A to E represent a pass at that level and N represents a near miss.

Employment Programmes

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide a breakdown of expenditure expressed *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at September 1997 prices and the number of starts for each Government employment programme since 1987; and what are the projected figures for 1998–99. [21520]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* Details of the expenditure and starts for each employment programme delivered by the Employment Service for which information is available are set out in the following table. Expenditure is given in cash terms and at the latest available prices July 1997. Projections for individual programmes for 1998–99 are still under discussion with the Employment Service.

Employment Service. Employment Programmes

Programmes	*Opps/Starts 000's*	*1987–88 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 1997 Prices £ million*	*Opps/Starts 000's*	*1988–89 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 97 Prices £ million*	*Opps/Starts 000's*	*1989–90 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 97 Prices £ million*
Young Workers Scheme	—	0.5	0.8	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Community Action	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Job Release Schemes	—	69.8	108.1	—	40.3	58.5	—	18.7	25.4
Job Review Workshops	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Job Splitting Scheme	—	0.4	0.6	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobclub	106	11.3	17.5	132	18.7	27.1	145	19.7	26.7
Jobfinder's Grant	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobmatch	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobplan Workshops	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobsearch seminars	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobshare	—	—	0.0	—	0.2	0.3	—	0.1	0.1
Jobstart Allowances	—	—	0.0	—	3.9	5.7	—	4.5	6.1
National Development Programme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
New Workers Scheme	—	15	23.2	—	4.4	6.4	—	—	0.0
Programme Development Fund	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Programme Centres	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Project Work	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Restart	90	8	12.4	64	5	7.3	64	5.3	7.2
Travel to Interview	—	0.5	0.8	—	1	1.5	—	0.7	0.9
Work Trials	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Workstart	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Workwise	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Programmes for PWD's[1]	18.4	91.6	141.9	23.2	99.8	144.9	25.9	110.1	149.4

Programmes	*Opps/Starts 000s*	*1990–91 Cash spend £ million*	*July 1997 prices £ million*	*Opps/Starts 000s*	*1991–92 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 1997 prices £ million*
Young Workers Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Community Action	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Job Release Schemes	—	9.5	11.9	—	—	0.0
Job Review Workshops	—	—	0.0	15	1.2	1.4
Job Splitting Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobclub	140	21.8	27.4	189	29.7	35.1
Jobfinder's Grant	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobmatch	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobplan Workshop	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobsearch seminars	—	—	0.0	35	2.4	2.8
Jobshare	—	0.1	0.1	—	—	0.0
Jobstart Allowance	—	2.5	3.1	—	—	0.0
National Development Programme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
New Workers Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Programme Development Fund	—	1.8	2.3	—	2.7	3.2
Programme Centres	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Project Work	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Restart	58	6	7.5	134	10.6	12.5
Travel to Interview	—	0.6	0.8	—	0.9	1.1
Work Trials	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Workstart	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Workwise	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Programmes for PWD's[1]	26.5	129.5	162.7	26.9	141.9	167.6

[1] Programmes for People with Disabilities (PWD's) include, Rehabilitation, Access to Work, Job Introduction and Supported Employment.

Programmes	*Opps/Starts 000's*	*1992–93 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 1997 Prices £ million*	*Opps/Starts 000's*	*1993–94 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 97 Prices £ million*	*Opps/Starts 000's*	*1994–95 Cash Spend £ million*	*July 97 Prices £ million*
Young Workers Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Community Action	—	—	0.0	23	14.4	15.9	48	93	100.9
Job Release Schemes	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Job Review Workshops	40	3.8	4.3	37	3	3.3	37	2.2	2.4
Job Splitting Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobclub	220	38.7	43.9	249	40.8	44.9	266	42.7	46.3
Jobfinder's Grant	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	5	0.7	0.8
Jobmatch	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0

Programmes	Opps/Starts 000's	1992–93 Cash Spend £ million	July 1997 Prices £ million	Opps/Starts 000's	1993–94 Cash Spend £ million	July 97 Prices £ million	Opps/Starts 000's	1994–95 Cash Spend £ million	July 97 Prices £ million
Jobplan Workshops	—	—	0.0	301	27.8	30.6	248	24.5	26.6
Jobsearch seminars	86	5	5.7	69	4.7	5.2	66	4.4	4.8
Jobshare	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobstart Allowance	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
National Development Fund	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
New Workers Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Programme Development Fund	—	5	5.7	—	3.8	4.2	—	1	1.1
Programme Centres	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Project Work	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Restart	120	10.9	12.4	143	10	11.0	147	11.4	12.4
Travel to Interview	—	1.5	1.7	—	1.7	1.9	—	2	2.2
Work Trials	—	—	0.0	14	1.2	1.3	18	1.1	1.2
Workstart	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	1	1.1
Workwise	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	10	2	2.2
Programmes for PWD's[1]	35.9	159.5	180.8	37.9	159.2	175.3	42.8	174.8	189.6

Programmes	Opps/Starts 000's	1995–96 Cash Spend £ million	July 1997 Prices £ million	Opps/Starts 000's	1996–97 Cash Spend £ million	July 97 Prices £ million	Opps/Starts 000's	1997–98 Cash Spend £ million	July 97 Prices £ million
Young Workers Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Community Action	—	74	78.1	—	2	2.1	—	—	0.0
Job Release Schemes	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Job Review Workshops	31	1.9	2.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Job Splitting Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobclub	240	42.2	44.6	189	35	36.0	160	30	30.0
Jobfinder's Grant	12	2.3	2.4	17	4	4.1	20	4	4.0
Jobmatch	2	2	2.1	3	4	4.1	4	3	3.0
Jobplan Workshops	165	17.1	18.1	144	15	15.4	93	10	10.0
Jobsearch seminars	60	3.5	3.7	62	5	5.1	79	5	5.0
Jobshare	0	0	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Jobstart Allowance	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
National Development Fund	—	0.3	0.3	—	0.4	0.4	—	0.9	0.9
New Workers Scheme	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Programme Development Fund	0	1	1.1	—	1	1.0	—	0.1	0.1
Programme Centres	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0	—	—	0.0
Project Work	—	—	0.0	—	4	4.1	63	69	69.0
Restart	105	9.3	9.8	77	7	7.2	45	5	5.0
Travel to Interview	—	2	2.1	38	1	1.0	38	1	1.0
Work Trials	29	1.8	1.9	28	1	1.0	30	1	1.0
Workstart	—	1	1.1	—	1	1.0	—	—	0.0
Workwise	28	5.7	6.0	26	6	6.2	20	5	5.0
Programmes for PWD's[1]	45.6	183.7	194.0	42.6	177.2	182.1	41.3	181.2	181.2

[1] Programmes for People with disabilities (PWD's) include, Rehabilitation, Access to Work, Job Introduction and Supported Employment.

Overseas Doctors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applications were *(a)* received and *(b)* granted from overseas doctors for work permits in the last year for which figures are available. [21874]

Mr. Alan Howarth: A total of 965 work permit applications for overseas doctors were recorded as received in the financial year 1996–97. A small proportion of these were appeals against an earlier refusal and relate to the same individual. The number of applications approved was 888.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the relationship between tourism and jobs in rural areas. [22020]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No such assessment has been made by this Department. The Government recognise the importance of the tourism industry to the national economy, in rural and urban areas alike.

Further Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students in the full-time education and training option within the New Deal for those aged 18 to

24 years will have greater income than other students in further education. [22112]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Young people in the Full-Time education and Training option of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds will receive an allowance equivalent to their usual benefits, including any passported benefits to which they may be entitled. Information on the average income of other students in further education is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Higher Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the total level of his Department's budget, in 1995–96 prices, for higher education in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; if he will estimate what such figures would be for (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99 on the basis of the estimates of the gross domestic deflator contained in the November 1996 Budget; and if he will make a statement. [21110]

Dr. Howells: The total level of the Department's budget for higher education in 1997–98 at 1995–96 prices is £6.091 billion. Planned provision for 1998–99 at 1995–96 prices is £6.112 billion. Comparable figures using the GDP deflators contained in the November 1996 Budget are £6.129 billion and £6.219 billion respectively.

Access and Foundation Courses

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the purpose of access and foundation courses, and on their relationship to higher education. [22103]

Dr. Howells: Access Courses are courses of further education which prepare students for entry to higher education. They provide mainly for mature students without conventional entry qualifications, who have the ability to benefit from higher education but do not yet feel ready for entry. They also help the needs of specific groups in the community identified as under-represented in higher education.

Foundation courses provided by higher education institutions are less well defined. Sometimes they are offered by higher education institutions as a conversion facility for students whose qualifications are not appropriate for the subject to be studied. Sometimes they are a "Year 0", a preparation for degree programmes.

Circulars

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will ensure that Education Circular 23/94 is amended to require comments on objections to a change of a local education authority education scheme are sent to him as a matter of course and that local education authorities take serious consideration of objections. [22259]

Mr. Byers: As Circular 23/94 makes clear, where Local Education Authority (LEA) proposals to reorganise the pattern of educational provision attract statutory objections, those objections and the LEA's comments on them must be sent to the Secretary of State, who decides all such proposals. All objections and comments on them are given serious consideration before any decision is taken. We see no need, therefore, to amend Circular 23/94 to cover this point.

School Meals

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the circumstances wherein it would be deemed unreasonable for a local education authority to provide a school lunch under the terms of Clause 103 (2) of the School Standards and Framework Bill. [21918]

Ms Estelle Morris: This will be for the local education authority to decide in the fist instance and will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. It could, for example, apply where a child did not turn up for their meal until the very end of the lunch break.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities in England and Wales offer only a restricted paid meals service. [21917]

Ms Estelle Morris: I am aware that the local education authorities for Buckinghamshire, Bournemouth, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Harrow, Hereford and Worcester, Kingston upon Thames, Lincolnshire, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire, Rutland and Somerset offer meals for sale in some but not all of their schools. Individual schools may make their own arrangements. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for education in Wales.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities in England and Wales do not offer a paid meals service. [21916]

Ms Estelle Morris: I am not aware of any local education authorities in England that do not offer a paid meals service in any of their schools. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for education in Wales.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, for each local education authority, in the most recent three years for which the information is available, the budgeted and actual expenditure by the Funding Agency for Schools on annual maintenance grant for grant maintained schools. [22058]

Mr. Byers: The calculation of annual maintenance grant for individual grant maintained schools in England is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have therefore written to Sir Anthony Tippet, Chairman of the Funding Agency, to ask him to provide the figures requested.

Modern Apprenticeships

Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the future of funding for modern apprenticeships. [21957]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 9 December that we are making available an extra £10 million for Modern Apprenticeships next year, enough to fund 10,000 places more than previously planned.

Youth Unemployment (Voluntary Work)

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what opportunities will be available for young unemployed people to take up work in the voluntary sector as part of the New Deal. [20170]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The voluntary sector can offer young people work experience under the Employment, Voluntary Sector or Environment Task Force options of the New Deal for unemployed 18–24 year olds. The broad range of voluntary organisations involved in the New Deal will ensure a wide range of opportunities for young people to undertake work of value to their local communities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fair Trade (Coffee and Tea)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the oral statement by the Secretary of State for International Development, *Official Report*, 5 November 1997, column 332, if he will instruct officials to serve coffee and tea furnished by suppliers who adhere to fair trade standards in her Department. [15500]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *617*. All procurement decisions in the Department are based on the Government's policy of value for money.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to minimise the effects of the millennium computer compliance problem on businesses. [18643]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* Private sector businesses are responsible for correcting their own millennium bug problems. However, the Government have been acting in concert with industry organisations to raise awareness of the problem and signpost solutions. On 29 September, the President of the Board of Trade announced a new initiative, Action 2000, to spur industry into tackling the problem. Action 2000 will focus on what businesses need to do to fix their systems. On 28 October I announced that Don Cruickshank would be Action 2000 Chairman. The Terms of Reference of Action 2000 were outlined in my reply to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns, *50–51*.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on progress in establishing Action 2000. [20803]

Mrs. Roche: Don Cruickshank, the Chairman of Action 2000, has appointed an acting Director to assist him and they are working actively with the Department, and with several other organisations to develop a range of activities to help businesses tackle the problem. Contracts have been placed with professional organisations to recruit full-time staff; to research industry's progress, developing a better understanding of what is inhibiting its progress; and to help devise a strategy for effectively communicating the messages and the help which will be available to businesses.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff are working on millennium computer compliance at her Department *(a)* for her Department's systems and *(b)* to educate business. [20917]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]: (a)* The resources devoted to the millennium compliance of the core Department's own system are subject to regular change as individual projects start and conclude. Currently, approximately 23 staff from private sector contractors and three in-house staff are engaged on such work.

(b) The number of staff involved in helping to establish the Department's Action 2000 initiative in partnership with industry to support UK businesses is four full time officials and one consultant.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what proportion of the public sector she estimates will be fully millennium computer compliant by 31 December 1999; and if she will make a statement; [21498]

(2) if she will make a single Minister responsible for ensuring public sector millennium computer compliance, across all public sector bodies; and if she will make a statement. [21499]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The responsibility within Government for ensuring that the public sector takes action to avoid problems arising from the millennium date change rests with the Secretary of State concerned. The Group which I chair will bring together Ministers from the key departments to ensure that the action is properly co-ordinated.

Oil and Gas Employment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her estimate of jobs created by the development of United Kingdom Continental Shelf gas and oil resources *(a)* offshore and *(b)* in contracting and supply industries onshore. [19990]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 9 December 1997]: (a)* The Inland Revenue estimates the number of people employed offshore to be around 26,850.

(b) There are no comprehensive official statistics for this industrial sector due to the difficulties in identifying the goods and services used in the development of oil and gas resources, but the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association has estimated that direct and indirect employment onshore could be some 300,000. In the early 1970s, UK suppliers and contractors' share of UKCS developments was estimated to be 25 to 30 per cent. In 1991, the last year for which data were collated the UK share was 78 per cent.

Armoured Vehicle Exports

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to her answer of 18 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *370*, on export licences and Gulf Transac, if she is now in a position to reply. [20034]

Mrs. Roche: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 19 December and have placed a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Parliamentary Answer

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to provide a substantive reply to the question of 24 July from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley on export licences issued to Alvis. [20035]

Mrs. Roche: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 19 December and have placed a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Export Initiatives

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the additional cost to her Department of undertaking work previously administered by the Home Office Export Initiative; and from which budget it will be found. [20014]

Mrs. Roche: Overseas Trade Services provides advice and assistance to all British companies seeking to trade overseas. It is not possible to estimate the proportion allocated to companies in the security industries sector.

Toyota

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will raise objections in the Competition Directorate over French subsidies to Toyota. [20916]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The Commission (DGIV) will examine any aid package to determine whether it is compatible with the State aid rules of the Treaty of Rome and the terms of the Motor Vehicles Framework. They have the power to reduce or reject aid which is not compatible. Provided the aid is compatible with the Framework there will be no grounds to object.

Diamond Cable Communications (UK) Ltd.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received concerning Diamond Cable Communications (UK) Ltd. [21860]

Mrs. Roche: The Department has received five letters from hon. Members concerning Diamond Cable during 1997. Three related to the Company's decision to introduce a charge for off-peak local calls to Internet Service Providers. Two were individual questions about the siting of street cabinets within the company's franchises.

Country Desks

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many country desks there are in her Department. [21858]

Mrs. Roche: All overseas countries and territories are covered by a DTI country desk. Full details of the structure can be found in the DTI Functional Directory, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Territorial Employment Pacts

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's objectives for territorial employment pacts. [21851]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn, (Mr. Jones) on 16 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *229*.

I look to the 10 territorial employment pacts being supported by the Commission to develop effective local partnerships which, by closer co-operation between the partners, will improve economic development and job creation in the areas concerned. Successful partnerships should provide a model for similar action in other areas.

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) pursuant to her answer of 24 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *330*, if she will list the 59 applications for licences for the export of goods controlled under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order, listing those licences which *(a)* have been granted, *(b)* have been refused and *(c)* are still pending and the categories of equipment or services that they cover; [20037]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *124*, if she will list the *(a)* companies which have been licensed and *(b)* equipment involved, in the 22 licences which her Department has approved; how many applications for licences to export arms to Indonesia remain for decision; and when she expects decisions to be made. [20009]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *124–26*. The provision of services to Indonesia is not controlled.

As regards the disclosure of the identity of the licensees and details of the goods concerned, inquiries are being made under the non-statutory Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Since confidential information is involved, the consent of the licensees is being sought for its disclosure. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House. At 13 November 1997, 65 applications to export to Indonesia goods controlled under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order (the so-called "Military List") were awaiting a decision: 25 applications for a standard individual export licence and 40 for an Open Individual Export Licence. The entry in the legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as the goods' rating.

Applications for standard individual licences to export to Indonesia goods on the Military List awaiting a decision at 13 November

Rating	Number of applications covering goods with this rating
ML1	6
ML2	1
ML3	3
ML5	2
ML6	2
ML7	1
ML9	2
ML10	1
ML11	5
ML13	1
ML14	2
ML15	2

Applications for open individual licences to export to Indonesia goods on the Military List awaiting a decision at 13 November[1]

Rating	Number of applications covering goods with this rating
ML1	1
ML2	2
ML3	3
ML4	2
ML5	2
ML6	1
ML7	1
ML8	3
ML9	7
ML10	11
ML11	9
ML13	2
ML15	2
ML21	1

[1] OIELs often cover a range of countries as well as a range of goods, controlled under several entries in the legislation. Where this is so the OIEL is included in the table in the total shown against each of the relevant countries and ratings.

However, this information should be considered in light of my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), on 30 October 1997, *Official Report* columns *870–71.*

As stated in the Export Control Organisation's Code of Practice, when applicants have submitted all of the necessary documentation, the aim is to give a substantive response within 20 working days when other Government Departments have to be consulted and 10 working days when such consultation is not necessary.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the arms for which licences for export to *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* India, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Algeria, *(e)* Angola, *(f)* Nigeria, *(g)* Syria, *(h)* Egypt, *(i)* Kenya, *(j)* Ethiopia and *(k)* Eritrea have been granted since 1 May. [20994]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the results are as follows: between 2 May and 21 November, eight Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued to export goods controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule I to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (the so-called "Military List") to one or more of the specified countries. The entry in the legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating.

Open Individual Export Licences issued covering goods on the Military List between 2 May and 21 November[1]

	Rating			
	ML5	ML9	ML10	ML11
Turkey	1	0	0	0
India	0	2	2	0
Pakistan	0	1	0	0
Algeria	0	0	0	0
Angola	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	0	0	0	0
Syria	0	0	0	0
Egypt	1	0	0	1
Kenya	0	0	1	0
Ethiopia	0	0	0	0
Eritrea	0	0	0	0

[1] OIELs often cover a range of countries as well as a range of goods, controlled under several entries in the legislation. Where this is so the OIEL is included in the table in the total shown against each of the relevant countries and ratings. In addition, one Open Individual Export Licence was issued for the export to any destination of certain goods for use by specified persons working in the media.

However, this information should be considered in light of the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71.*

I will write to the hon. and learned Member as soon as possible with respect to the information requested about standard individual export licences and place a copy of that letter in the library.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the arms for which licences for export to *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* India, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Algeria, *(e)* Angola, *(f)*, Nigeria, *(g)* Syria, *(h)* Egypt, *(i)* Kenya, *(j)* Ethiopia and *(k)* Eritrea have been denied since 1 May, indicating the grounds for refusal in each case. [20995]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the results are as follows.

Between 2 May and 21 November, five applications were refused for standard individual licences to export goods controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule I to the Export of Goods (control) Order 1994 (the so-called "Military List") to one or more of the specified countries. The entry in the legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating.

Applications refused for standard individual export licences covering goods on the Military List between 2 May and 21 November

	Rating				
	ML1	ML3	ML6	ML7	ML11
Turkey	1	0	0	0	0
India	0	0	0	0	0
Pakistan	0	1	0	0	0
Algeria	0	0	0	0	0
Angola	0	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	0	0	1	0	1
Syria	0	0	0	0	0
Egypt	0	0	0	0	0
Kenya	0	0	0	1	0
Ethiopia	0	0	0	0	0
Eritrea	0	0	0	0	0

No Application for open individual licences to export such goods to these countries were refused in the period.

However, this information should be considered in the light of the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley, (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

The decision to refuse the applications listed above were made after careful consideration of each case against the criteria announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*.

Professional Qualifications

Mr. Syms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to extend recognition under the Communities (Recognition of Professional Qualifications) Regulations 1991 to organisations without a Royal Charter. [21885]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Regulations fulfil the UK's commitment under the Treaty of Rome to implement Directive 89/48/EEC which facilitates free movement through the mutual recognition of qualifications awarded in respect of regulation professions. They list those professions regulated by law or public authority in the UK, which include titles awarded by professional bodies incorporated by Royal Charter.

There are no plans to extend the Regulations to bodies which do not hold a Royal Charter.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date Euratom Safeguards Inspectors made their first visit to Sellafield. [22138]

Mrs. Roche: Eurotom Safeguards Inspectors made their first visit to Sellafield on 4 December 1973.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mr. Dismore: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement of progress on the implementation of the EU SME Initiative for England. [22247]

Mrs. Roche: I am pleased to announce that the Initiative was ratified by the Commission on 12 December 1997. This is welcome news for SMEs in the Objective 1, 2 and 5(b) areas of England, who will benefit from some £34 million of European structural funds. The Initiative, which will help SMEs access new international markets and improve their competitiveness, will run until the end of 1999.

Magnox Electric (Merger)

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made on the plans to merge Magnox Electric with British Nuclear Fuels; and if she will make a statement. [22363]

Mr. Battle: I am pleased to report that, subject to Parliamentary clearance of certain proposed financial arrangements, we expect to effect the first stage of the merger—namely the transfer of the Government's shareholding in Magnox Electric to BNFL—early in the New Year. Full integration of the combined businesses of the two companies is expected to be completed about 12 months after the share transfer, subject to the companies meeting the requirements of the relevant regulators.

Safety will continue to be the companies' overriding concern. The merger will not change that.

Before full integration can take place, BNFL will need to have obtained new nuclear site licences, new radioactive discharge authorisations and a revised electricity generation licence to replace those currently held by Magnox Electric. The independent nuclear safety, environmental and electricity regulating authorities have been consulted about the proposed integration arrangements and have indicated that they are prepared to consider applications on the basis of those arrangements.

The merger will create an enlarged, integrated and strong BNFL able, for the first time, to manage all aspects of the magnox business as a whole.

Under existing arrangements, a substantial part of Magnox Electric's costs relate to fuel, reprocessing and waste management services provided by BNFL. A principal aim of the merger is to bring together the financial and management responsibilities for these processes to create better incentives for securing cost reductions.

Bringing together magnox generation and the supporting fuel cycle services under one management will also mean the business can be managed as a whole and with greater efficiency. The merger should therefore accelerate the cost reduction and business improvement programmes which each of the companies has been separately pursuing. It will remove the barriers which exist between Magnox as customer and BNFL as supplier bringing greater transparency to the underlying economics of the business and providing opportunities to combine the technical and commercial skills which currently exist within the two companies.

I have taken steps, and know that many people are concerned, to ensure that the full costs of the companies' nuclear liabilities will be met. I am pleased to announce that the combined group will establish an internal dedicated Liabilities Fund consisting of cash and realisable assets which will ensure that the full costs of all future liabilities of Magnox and BNFL can be met as they fall due. I am sure that this development coupled with the greater transparency that this will entail will be widely welcomed.

In examining how to effect the merger, a great deal of attention was paid to the financial arrangements. When the nuclear generating industry was re-organised at the end of March 1996, Magnox Electric received an undertaking in exchange for, and equivalent in value to, the net book value of assets transferred out of the company and the liabilities it took on from Scottish Nuclear. The undertaking provides for the Government to make payments to enable Magnox to meet its future financial obligations. The principal value of that undertaking at March 1996 was £3.7 billion. That value is increased annually by 4.5 per cent in real terms and is projected to have a value of £4.3 billion in March 1998. We have carried out with Magnox Electric and BNFL a thorough review of the arrangements to apply to the combined organisation. In particular, we needed to get an up to date assessment of the forecast cost of discharging

liabilities and then determine what level of Government undertaking would be appropriate to the combined organisation. The conclusion is that the principal sum of a new undertaking (to replace the existing undertaking to Magnox Electric) should be set at £3.7 billion as at 31 March 1998, but that it would be appropriate to apply the same escalation terms as in the existing undertaking to Magnox Electric. This represents an immediate reduction of some £600 million in the Government's current liability.

The new arrangements will also bring to an end assurances given by the Government in 1990 and reaffirmed each year since then which give Magnox Electric added comfort that the Government will, if necessary, help them to meet the costs of their long term nuclear liabilities. Magnox Electric has successfully reduced the large deficit for nuclear liabilities in its balance sheet and projects that without the benefits of integration the gap would have reduced to £0.5 billion by the end of the current financial year. Taking into account the benefits which are expected to flow from the merger with BNFL, all three parties have agreed that there is no need for the Government assurances to continue beyond share transfer.

Given the length of time which these arrangements are to cover, there is provision for the value of the proposed new undertaking to be subject to limited review every five years or earlier if Government and BNFL agree.

We expect the combined group to reduce substantially the costs of discharging magnox liabilities through efficiency savings. In recognition of this, a formal mechanism will be put in place under which Government and the combined business will share the benefit of the first £1.6 billion (at 31 March 1998 prices) of reductions in the company's magnox-related nuclear provisions. This will allow the undertaking to be adjusted downwards by up to £0.8 billion (at the same base price). The majority of these benefits are expected to accrue within the first ten years after the merger.

In summary, the merger will result in a robust and viable group, better placed and better incentivised to manage the magnox business as a whole and to secure savings for the taxpayer. At the same time it will bring the establishment of a dedicated, internal fund to meet the companies' nuclear liabilities; there will be an immediate reduction of some £1.1 billion in the Government's current liability, and incentives will be introduced for the combined business to make further substantial savings which the Government will share. The merger has the full support of the Boards of both Magnox and BNFL.

My Department is today laying before this House a Departmental Minute about the new financial undertaking which is proposed to be given to the integrated group. A copy of that Minute together with a Briefing Note, which provides more detailed information on the proposed integration of the two companies, is being placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Johnson & Johnson

Mr. Swayne: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received on the provision of EU assistance to Johnson & Johnson for its move from New Milton to the Republic of Ireland. [22265]

Mrs. Roche: I am not aware of any such representations about EU assistance.

Citizens First Campaign

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action her Department is taking to promote the second phase of the Citizens First campaign launched by the European Commission on 25 November. [22199]

Mrs. Roche: My colleague the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe is hosting, with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a press conference on 20 January to promote the second phase of the campaign in this country. We shall also be helping the Commission to distribute Citizens First literature.

Correspondence

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many letters the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs has sent to hon. Members since his appointment; how many of the letters he signed personally; and how many of the letters were sent with a facsimile of his signature. [22186]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have sent a great many letters to hon. Members, but since ensuring a speedy, accurate and helpful response is my priority, neither I nor my staff have time to collect the information in the form requested.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry did not include a salutation and a signature on her letter of 11 December to the hon. Member for Christchurch in response to his to the Secretary of State on 13 November concerning Mr. John Reid. [22068]

Mrs. Roche: This occurred due to a clerical oversight. A revised letter (concerning Mr. M. Reid of John Reid & Sons) has been sent to the hon. Member.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. David Heath: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Government will seek an amendment to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment to include the right of people adversely affected by multinational action abroad to take legal action against the multinational in their home country. [21929]

Mrs. Roche: No. This is a matter of domestic law in the country concerned and of international legal co-operation.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support her Department has given to the development and commercialisation of the technology described as FPSO over the last 10 years. [12695]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* We have assumed that the hon. Member when he uses the abbreviation FPSO is referring to the marine installations used in the oil and gas industry called Floating Production, Storage and Offloading facilities. FPSOs are large ships which are built for the purpose or are converted from oil tankers. Typically these ships displace over 100,000 tonnes.

1995 saw the publication of an authoritative report by a Working Group established by DTI with strong representation from UK industry. The Working Group sought to address the problem of the lack of competitive capability within the UK to supply FPSOs and to identify measures which could help to improve competitiveness. Since the publication of that report the UK has built up a strong capability in the building, conversion and equipping of FPSOs. The main centres of activity are Newcastle, Belfast, Glasgow and Inverness.

My Department, through the Research and Development Programme operated by the Infrastructure and Energy Projects Directorate, has provided £604,868 towards the costs of projects related to FPSO construction and operation over the last 10 years.

Laser Pens

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines her Department has produced on the level of proof that will be required for the purchase of laser pens with beams more powerful then one milliwatt. [15920]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Laser pens with beams of more than one milliwatt are classified as class 3 A, 3 B and 4 in the BS EN 60825–Part 1: 1994 and in my statement of 28 October, I made clear the department's view that such pens present an unacceptable risk when used by the general public.

Under the General Product Safety Regulations such products may only be supplied if they are exclusively used in the context of a commercial activity and are not supplied to a consumer.

Suppliers who fail to comply with the Regulations face penalties of a maximum fine of £5,000 and/or a maximum term of three months in prison.

For further guidance on levels of proofs retailers may be advised to seek legal advice.

Sale of Goods

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is her policy to ban products from retail sale if they pose a significant health risk to the general public; and if she will make a statement. [20118]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Yes, where that is the most appropriate way to reduce such risks. The action take to ban dangerous fireworks is an example of how law can be applied.

Taskforce 2000

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the members of the Action 2000 group; if she will make a statement on its remit; and to what extent its work supercedes that of Taskforce 2000. [20373]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* I have appointed Don Cruickshank to be Chairman of Action 2000 and he is consulting a range of organisations about the membership of the Advisory Board, as required by the terms of his appointment. His selection of members will then be made in consultation with me and taking due account of the Code of Practice published by the Commissioner on Public Appointments.

On the question of Action 2000's remit, I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 17 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *50–51* and on 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *190–91*.

The Department's funding of Taskforce 2000 will cease on 31 March 1998 or when the £350,000 to which we are committed has been spent, whichever is the sooner. The emphasis needs to shift from telling businesses that a problem exists to ensuring that they take appropriate action, and I established Action 2000 to look at all aspects of the problem.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representatives she has received in respect of the work of Taskforce 2000; and if she will place copies of all representations in the Library. [20374]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government have discussed the work of Taskforce 2000 with several organisations, including the CBI, the Federation of the Electronics Industry, the Computing Services and Software Association, the National Computing Centre, and Action 2000. We have also received unsolicited letters from companies and private individuals. Unsolicited representations are treated in confidence by the Department.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the forecasts relating to the employment consequences arising from the implementation of a minimum wage contained in representations evaluated by her Department. [20911]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* It is for the Low Pay Commission to evaluate representations about the National Minimum Wage, including any containing forecasts of employment consequences.

Power Stations

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the relative costs of generating power *(a)* from coal in an old power station running at base load and *(b)* a new gas power station operating at peak times. [20895]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* The Department does not produce figures regarding individual types of plant as the costs from these vary widely depending on the plant design and fuel costs. However in its report on the proposed merger between PowerGen plc and Midlands Electricity plc in April 1996, the MMC estimated the relative capital, operating and fuel costs of coal fired and open cycle gas fired plant. From these figures one can conclude that old coal fired plant operating at a 90 per cent. load factor would generate electricity at a cost of £15 per megawatt hour while new peak lopping Open Cycle Gas Fired Plant operating at a 10 per cent. load factor would generate electricity at a cost of £69 per megawatt hour.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department will decide its future policy on new gas-fired power stations. [21769]

Mrs. Beckett: This must await the outcome of the Review announced on Wednesday 3 December. A timetable will be announced shortly.

Mr. Andy King: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will announce the terms of reference for the review on the approval of new power stations which was announced by the Prime Minister on 3 December. [22263]

Mrs. Beckett: The Prime Minister announced in the House on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns 1002–03 that the Government would review the long-term energy requirements of the nation and make sure that we had an energy policy consistent with a competitive industry and the long-term energy needs of the country. As part of this, a review is being undertaken into energy sources for power generation as announced on 3 December, and its terms of reference are as follows:

The Review will look at medium and longer-term scenarios for the development of generating capacity and sources of fuel supply for generation, and consider the implications of high levels of dependence on any particular fuel, source of supply, transport route, or technology.

It will take as its starting point trends in energy sources for power generation, especially the growing dependence on gas, taking into account the energy policy objective of secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices and, in particular, the role of coal. Account will also be taken of the objective of sustainable development (including the meeting of environmental targets), and of European and other international obligations.

The Review will also consider technical factors related to the growing use of gas in generation, including:

the provision of system stability, frequency control, flexibility of response to demand of or supply variations, and ancillary security services;

the possibilities for, and likelihood of, interruption of gas supplies, the impact of such interruptions, and possible measures, such as the holding of fuel stocks, to mitigate the risks and consequences of interruption;

in respect of generators connected to regional distribution systems rather than directly to the Grid, the circumstances, if any, in which they may have an impact on the ability of the Grid operator to manage the balance of supply and demand both nationally and locally, and the significance of such impacts;

any geographical and locational factors; the implications of the siting of power stations for energy security and systems stability.

While a number of the issues covered in the Review relate principally to England and Wales, the Scottish aspects will also be covered.

The Review will make recommendations to Ministers, in the light of the above considerations, as to:

(a) the energy policy considerations relevant to applications for consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and in considering notifications under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976; and

(b) any consequences of these considerations for guidance to local authorities as respects planning applications for generating plan not subject to section 36.

Interested parties are invited to submit their representations in writing by Monday 16 February 1998. The Department reserves the right to disclose or publish any representation unless it is clearly marked "in confidence".

In addition, the following arrangements will apply during the period of the Review as respects electricity generation in Great Britain:

Applications under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989

While the Review is under way, the Secretary of State proposes to defer decisions on outstanding or new applications under section 36.

Notifications under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976

The Energy Act 1976 applies separate controls on the establishment of or conversion to an oil or gas-fired electricity generating station (section 14(1)), and on the making or extending or arrangements for the supply of gas to such a station (section 14(2)). During the period of the Review, the Secretary of State proposes to defer consideration of the following:

(a) notifications relating to natural gas or oil fired generating stations or natural gas supply arrangements, where the decision on the related section 36 application is deferred or the application has not been made;

(b) notifications relating to natural gas or oil fired generating stations where the station is between 10MW and 50MW capacity (stations below 10MW are exempt under an Order); and

(c) notifications relating to natural gas supply arrangements where consideration of the section 14(1) notification in respect of the natural gas fired generating station in question is deferred under (b),

and, subject to the above and any special circumstances (for example as respects the interval that has elapsed), proposes to continue to consider:

(i) notifications relating to natural gas or oil fired generating stations or natural gas supply arrangements where the section 36 consent for the station in question has been issued; and

(ii) where section 36 does not apply, notifications relating to natural gas supply arrangements where the Secretary of State has indicated that he or she does not object to the section 14(1) notification in respect of the natural gas fired generating station in question.

Applications under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989

These applications, which relate to overhead electric lines, will generally continue to be processed during the period of the Review. However, where the application relates solely to a deferred power generation project, it is proposed to defer work such as public inquiries or related wayleave hearings where there might be a risk of incurring nugatory expenditure.

Requests for exceptions

The Secretary of State will be prepared to consider, on their merits, reasoned requests for exceptions to be made in particular cases. In this context, the Secretary of State would be mindful of the environmental and other benefits of combined heat and power.

Power generation below 10MW

Subject to powers of secondary legislation, neither section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, nor section 14 of the Energy Act 1976 currently apply to such cases. These cases will accordingly be able to proceed as before during the period of the Review.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent on refurbishing and refurnishing *(a)* ministerial offices in her Department and *(b)* her official President's apartment. [21765]

Mrs. Beckett: The amounts spent are as follows:

(a) £8,698

(b) £64,314

Electricity and Coal Industries

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a Minister of her Department was present at the meetings held by the Paymaster General with the electricity and coal industries on 15 December. [21768]

Mrs. Beckett: DTI was represented at official level.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *120–22*, on secondees from the private sector, what has been the cost to public funds of the 113 placements. [21857]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Over a 12 month period, the Department will have reimbursed the employers of the 113 secondees approximately £2.55 million towards their employment costs.

British Coal

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what restrictions are placed upon British Coal by the Government to ensure that compensation claims are settled within a set budget; [22188]

(2) what budgetary constraints are placed upon British Coal to settle multiple compensation claims within a set of financial limits. [22187]

Mr. Battle: Under the standard arrangements for nationalised industries, British Coal's financial budget is governed by the External Financing Limit (EFL) notified by the Department to Parliament. The EFL is then closely monitored by the Department to ensure that total expenditure is properly managed by the Corporation.

Expenditure associated with any compensation awards that have been fully established, either by a Court or by an admission of liability by British Coal, are expected to be accommodated within the EFL for any one year in question. Any change to the EFL is based upon consideration of the total financing requirements of the Corporation, rather than on a particular category of expenditure.

It is intended that responsibility for British Coal health liabilities will transfer to the Department at the end of 1997.

Concessionary Fuel Agreement

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the Mineworkers' Concessionary Fuel Scheme for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 and what is the projected cost for 1997–98; what is the projected cost of the scheme for the first year of operation based on the new arrangements; how many beneficiaries will be detrimentally affected by the new arrangements; and what is the projected saving to public funds of the new arrangements. [22275]

Mr. Battle: The cost of providing concessionary fuel and cash in lieu of fuel to all ex-employees of British Coal and their dependants, for which liability transferred to the Secretary of State on March 1995, was £85 million in 1995–96, and £87 million in 1996–97. The projected cost in 1997–98 is £85 million. These figures are affected by variations in the applicable rate of VAT, differential rates in the switching from fuel to cash in lieu from year to year, and the severity of the winters which affected the uptake of fuel. The cost in 1998–99 is expected to be in the range £73–77 million depending on the extent of further switching away from fuel to cash in lieu, and allowing for the lower rate of VAT on fuel. The saving in public funds from the new arrangements derives from the competitive prices secured on a range of smokeless fuel.

Beneficiaries who receive coal are unaffected by the new arrangements. Any adjustments in respect of anthracite are likely to be marginal. The entitlements of certain manufactured smokeless fuels will be reduced as a result of re-balancing but other entitlements will increase, and in virtually all cases where entitlements are reduced beneficiaries will have the option of switching to an alternative fuel which carries a higher entitlement. Thus, the vast majority of beneficiaries need be no worse off in terms of the quantity of fuel available to them, and many could be better off.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the coal mining trade unions were informed of the proposed new arrangements to the Concessionary Fuel Agreement; and when the consultation period will end. [22233]

Mr. Battle: My Department wrote to the mining unions on 17 December explaining the new arrangements for concessionary fuel from March 1998, and proposed a meeting in the early New Year.

FirstBus, Glasgow

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to announce his decision on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report relating to the FirstBus operations in Glasgow; and if she will make a statement. [22120]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My right hon. Friend is considering the Director General of Fair Trading's advice on FirstBus's request for a review of the decision of the then Minister for Corporate and Consumer Affairs following the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on FirstBus's acquisition of S. B. Holdings. She will announce her decision on FirstBus's request as quickly as is practicable.

HEALTH

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on overseas travel for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992—93, (vi) 1993—94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997; and if he will provide a breakdown to show (1) air fares and (2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. [15219]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Details of the expenditure of the Department of Health, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on overseas travel for the years 1993–94 to 1996–97 are shown in the table.

The Department changed its accounting software in 1992–93 and detailed figures are not available for earlier years. The Department formed part of the Department of Health and Social Security until July 1988.

£000

	Central Department		*Agencies*		*NDPBs*	
	Air fares	*Other related expenses*	*Air fares*	*Other related expenses*	*Air fares*	*Other related expenses*
1993–94	[1]1,157	[1]315	[1]351			
1994–95	[1]649	[1]737	[1]312			
1995–96	368	124	284	212	432	54
1996–97	226	275	249	187	416	50
1 May—30 September 1997	134	107	114	67	330	34

[1] The figures include travel, accommodation and associated costs.

Community Health Nurses (South-West)

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of community health nurses in each health authority in *(a)* Cornwall and *(b)* Devon in each year since 1979 for which figures are available. [15657]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 12 November 1997]:* The information requested is available from 1982 and is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) community health nurses in each health authority in Cornwall and Devon; as at 30 September each year

whole-time equivalents

Year	*Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA*	*North and East Devon HA*		*South and West Devon HA*	
		Exeter DHA	*North Devon DHA*	*Plymouth DHA*	*Torbay DHA*
1982	350		780		
1983	340		800		
1984	360		790		
1985	370		830		
1986	370		840		
1987	370	250	90	300	190
1988	340	290	90	310	220
1989	370	310	110	290	190
1990	580	360	120	300	230
1991	570	390	120	300	250
1992	570	420	130	300	250
1993	550	540		590	
1994	630	560		570	
1995	500	530		560	
1996	530	540		580	

Notes:

1. Figures are not available before 1982 and for individual health authorities from 1982 to 1986.
2. Figures for 1982 to 1989 are for "primary healthcare" nursing and midwifery staff, including: health visitors, district nurses, school nurses, community midwives and a small number of other "primary healthcare" nursing and midwifery staff. The figures for 1990 to 1994 cover the same staff groups as for 1982 to 1989, but include community psychiatric nurses and community learning difficulties nurses, and exclude community midwives. The figures for 1995 to 1996 are based on new occupation codes and are not, therefore, directly comparable with figures for earlier years although they cover similar groups to those used in 1990 to 1994.

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

Source:

Department of Health's annual non-medical workforce census.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of the Draft EU Directive on Tobacco Advertising if a regulatory appraisal was prepared, pursuant to the Cabinet Office Guidelines, "Regulation in the Balance"; if a risk assessment and a compliance cost assessment were prepared in respect of the same directive and, pursuant to the same guidelines; which Minister read and signed the appraisal and assessments, pursuant to the guidelines; if he will publish the regulatory appraisal compliance cost assessment and risk assessment in respect of the directive; and if all requirements of the guidelines were fulfilled in respect of this directive. [20883]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 15 December 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to my letter of 19 December 1997 to the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to give a substantive reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon on 10 December on tobacco advertising, to which a holding reply was given on 15 December; and for what reasons a holding reply was given. [21908]

Ms Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave today. A holding reply was given because at the time the question was asked the matter at issue was the subject of a letter from the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation to me. A reply to that letter has now been given and sets out the Government's position in full. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost to the NHS in terms of emergency admissions and other NHS treatment as a result of reductions in expenditure on chiropody services. [17801]

Mr. Boateng: None. We have not received any evidence that emergency admissions or any other National Health Service treatment has increased as a result of changes in service provision.

Pathology Services

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department received the 1995 report Review of Pathology Services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust; and what action was taken. [17798]

Mr. Boateng: The 1995 report Review of Pathology Services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals National Health Service Trust was an internal document commissioned by the Trust to enable it to develop its formal strategy in relation to Pathology services. Therefore, a copy of the report was not sent by the trust to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) from which providers of pathology services, and in what proportion, were (i) histopathology/cytology, (ii) microbiology, (iii) biochemistry and (iv) haematology test procured by the Thanet Healthcare Trust or its predecessor in each year since 1985; [17814]

(2) what proportion of (i) histopathology/cytology, (ii) microbiology, (iii) biochemistry and (iv) haematology tests were carried out by the Kent and Canterbury NHS Trust Pathology Service in each year since 1985 as a result of referrals from the private sector; and what proportion were from the National Health Services; [17795]

(3) what proportion of histopathology/cytology tests were carried out by the Kent and Canterbury NHS Trust Pathology Service in each year since 1985 as a result of referrals from the private sector; and what proportion were from the National Health Service; [17794]

(4) from which providers of pathology services, and in what proportion, were (i) histopathology/cytology, (ii) microbiology, (iii) biochemistry and (iv) haematology tests procured by the Kent and Canterbury NHS Trust or its predecessor in each year since 1985; [17792]

(5) from which providers of pathology services, and in what proportion, were (i) histopathology/cytology, (ii) microbiology, (iii) biochemistry and (iv) haematology tests procured by general practitioners in the East Kent Authority Area in each year since 1985; [17793]

(6) from which providers of pathology services, and in what proportion, were (i) histopathology/cytology, (ii) microbiology, (iii) biochemistry and (iv) haematology tests procured by the Chaucer Clinic in each year from its opening; [17815]

(7) from which providers of pathology services, and in what proportion, were (i) histopathology/cytology, (ii) microbiology, (iii) biochemistry and (iv) haematology tests procured by the William Harvey Hospital, Ashford in each year since 1985. [17791]

Mr. Boateng: The information is not collected centrally in the form requested. The data available centrally are contained in "Diagnostic Departments". The information was collected on the Department of Health form, KH11, "Diagnostic Departments, pathology", by regional health authority areas. The data are no longer collected. The last year of collection was 1993–94.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each meeting by each Minister since 1 May with individuals employed by NHS trusts and health authorities in London. [17594]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *597–98.*

GP Fundholding (North Essex)

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent by GP fundholders in the North Essex Health Authority area on administrative costs of operating the internal market in the last year for which figures are available. [18612]

Mr. Milburn: Fundholding general practitioners are allocated as part of their allotted sum a management allowance to meet the costs of managing their fund. This covers the employment of staff and other costs associated with the management of their fundholding budget, as well as the reimbursement of GP fundholding computing costs.

For 1997–98, a total of £2,604,000 has been allocated to North Essex Health Authority for the management costs of fundholders in their area.

Any management allowance under spent can be transferred to patient care.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the proportion of dental patients who request a second professional opinion before allowing treatment to go ahead. [18726]

Mr. Milburn: Patients who may seek the professional opinion of a second dentist wold not be recorded. The Dental Reference Service of the Dental Practice Board for England and Wales undertook 724 examinations of National Health Service dental patients at the request of the dentist or the patient in the year to 1 December 1997.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of alleged dental malpractice

and incompetence were notified to him by community health councils for the last year for which figures are available. [18727]

Mr. Milburn: Responsibility for investigating such allegations lies with the General Dental Council which has statutory functions under the Dentists Act 1984 in relation to both the professional conduct and the fitness to practise of dentists in the United Kingdom. The Council has a statutory remit to promote high standards of professional conduct among dentists.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental practitioners were in practice in the Greater London area at the latest available date. [19556]

Mr. Milburn: In the Greater London area there were 2,932 General Dental Service dentists on health authority lists at 30 September 1997. This figure includes principal dentists, assistants and vocational trainees. It does not include salaried, hospital or community dentists or dentists working solely in private practice.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people he estimates will be de-registered from NHS dental practices in the UK during 1998, as a result of the reduction in registration period from 24 to 15 months. [20997]

Mr. Milburn: From 1 September 1996, the registration period for both adult continuing care and child capitation was harmonised to provide patients with a period of continuing dental care for 15 months following each course of treatment. The most recent estimate is that registration numbers may gradually fall by about 4 million as a result of this change. However, the actual effect on the number of patients registered with a dentist will depend on the response to the incentive for many patients to attend the dentist on a more regular basis.

We estimate, on the same basis, that United Kingdom registration numbers may gradually fall by 4.5 million as a result of the change in registration period.

Regular attenders will be unaffected by the change as their registration period will roll forward when they attend their dentist.

Dentists are free to re-register any patients whose registrations have lapsed. It is for dentists to decide whether they wish to accept any patients onto their list.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of patients who will be de-registered from their dentists, as a result of the new regulations relating to the de-registering of patients who have not visited their dentist within the last 15 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Cornwall, in (i) numerical and (ii) percentage terms. [21323]

Mr. Milburn: From 1 September 1996, the registration period for both adult continuing care and child capitation payments was harmonised to provide patients with a period of continuing care for 15 months following each course of treatment. The most recent estimate is that registration numbers may gradually fall by 4 million as a result of this change.

This would represent about 15 per cent. of the total number of patients registered at 31 October 1997 (26.8 million) in England. No estimates for individual health authorities have been made.

Regular attenders will be unaffected by the change as their registration period will roll forward when they attend their dentist.

Dentists are free to re-register any patients whose registrations have lapsed. It is for dentists to decide whether they wish to accept any patient onto their list.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require NHS dentists to display prominently in their surgeries a list of *(a)* services and prices for treatment available on the NHS and *(b)* services available on the NHS dependent on the clinical advice of the dentist. [21640]

Mr. Milburn: Dentists are already required under their terms of service to display in a prominent position such information about charges for general dental services as the health authority for their area may approve, in accordance with any directions given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The information required includes how to get details of entitlement to, exemption from and remission of charges. Dentists are also required to compile and make available, to any person who reasonably requires one, a document about the provision of general dental services at their practice premises.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications of the NHS White Paper on NHS dentistry. [21639]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper sets out how the Government intend to build a modern and dependable National Health Service for the future. Health authorities will work with NHS trusts and Primary Care Groups to develop a Health Improvement Programme for their area. Dentists will be drawn into that process to contribute as appropriate to the planning and provision of services. Dentists also have their own separate and distinct contributions to make to the NHS and the Government will continue its dialogue with them about how they can best develop it.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of *(a)* the adult and *(b)* the child population registered with an NHS dentist, by health authority. [21900]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's latest estimate of the number, and proportion, of people registered with a dentist in Coventry. [21903]

Mr. Milburn: On 31 October 1997, 125,451 adults and 45,005 children were registered with a General Dental Service dentist practising from premises in the Coventry Health Authority area. These figures represent 36 per cent. and 70 per cent. respectively of the adult and child populations of Coventry at 30 June 1996.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to ensure that the nation's oral health is maintained. [21902]

Mr. Milburn: The Government are committed to National Health Service dentistry and have stated our intention to see it improved further. We intend to reduce inequalities in oral health status and to improve access to NHS services.

In September, we announced a £9 million new initiative Investing in Dentistry. This will help to improve the availability of General Dental Services and extend the benefits of good oral health by focusing help on those areas of the country where problems are most acute, enabling dentists to expand existing practices and set up new ones.

We are going ahead with the piloting of Personal Dental Services. This will encourage partnerships between health authorities and dentists to develop more flexible ways of providing primary oral health care to attune it better to local needs. An announcement on the expressions of interest we have received will be made shortly, but we are encouraged by the number and quality of the proposals that have been received.

Additionally, changes to the registration periods for both adult continuing care and child capitation patients will improve value for money by focusing payments to dentists on those patients receiving active care from them. Any savings generated will be put back into the General Dental Service, in a targeted way to achieve better oral health for the population.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what time and on what date the Chief Medical Officer advised the Minister of Agriculture about his opinion on the latest SEAC finding. [20781]

Ms Jowell: The Chief Medical Officer has consistently taken the view that any tissues which have been shown to transmit bovine spongiform encephalopathy should be kept out of the human food chain. He confirmed these views in respect of dorsal root ganglia directly the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee advice was received on the morning of 3 December 1997.

Travel Vaccines

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the provision of travel vaccines from the National Health Service. [20999]

Ms Jowell: Advice on appropriate measures to protect health when travelling aborad, including advice on immunisation and malaria prophylaxis, is available under the National Health Service. Currently some vaccines against infectious disease are provided free for travellers as a matter of public health policy, others are not. Broadly speaking, those vaccines provided free offer protection against diseases which might be spread on return to the United Kingdom. Immunisation in these cases benefits not only the recipient but also the community at large, since each individual immunisation contributes to the general control of disease. We recognise that inconsistencies and ambiguities have arisen over the years in the arrangements for travel vaccines and the way they are interpreted. We are seeking to resolve these anomalies as part of an ongoing internal review.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK received vaccination for travel aborad on the National Health Service in each of the last five years; and what was the cost to public funds. [21000]

Ms Jowell: It is not possible to say how many people were immunised for the purpose of travel abroad each year. Records are not kept of the number of people immunised and data on prescription items dispensed do not differentiate between primary courses (usually consisting of several doses of vaccine) and booster doses. The number of prescription items dispensed in England and the net ingredient costs for vaccines which may be given for the purposes of travel are given in the table. The data include some of the vaccines which will have been prescribed for reasons other than travel. The costs do not include dispensing costs. It is not possible to separately identify the cost of vaccinating patients in general practice.

The number of prescription items dispensed and net ingredient cost for vaccines administered for travel[1]: 1992–96 England

Year	*Total number of prescription items (millions)*	*Total cost (£ million)*
1992	3.2	16.5
1993	3.3	29.1
1994	3.4	40.5
1995	3.3	47.0
1996	3.3	49.1

[1] The travel vaccines are those preparations in the British National Formulary (BNF) [issue 30, September 1995] section 14.6—International travel: BCG, cholera, diphtheria, hepatitis A, meningococcal A&C, normal immunoglobulin, poliomyelitis, typhoid, typhoid-paratyphoid A&B and yellow fever. Some of these vaccines will have been prescribed for reasons other than travel.

Notes:

1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.
2. The net ingredient cost refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

Nurses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies for nurses there are in hospitals within the Greater London area. [21382]

Mr. Milburn: Figures on vacancies for Hospitals and Community Health Services nurses and midwives are collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics and published in the annual reports of the Review Body for Nursing staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine; copies are available in the Library.

Long-term Care

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were in National Health Service long-term care in England and Wales on 1 December. [21384]

Mr. Boateng: The information is not collected in the form requested. The available information is as follows: in England, in the first six months of 1997–98, health authorities reported 10,900 patients newly meeting eligibility criteria for continuing in-patient care. In the

same period, health authorities also reported an average of 16,450 beds occupied each day by patients meeting eligibility criteria for continuing in-patient care (i.e. a total of just of 3 million bed days).

Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Northwick Park Hospital, Kenton

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to visit Northwick Park hospital, Kenton. [21861]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has no plans to visit Northwick Park Hospital in the near future.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly patients are currently in Northwick Park hospital, Kenton. [21863]

Mr. Milburn: According to information from Harrow and Hillingdon National Health Service Trust, patients currently occupy 101 general beds for the elderly and 15 beds for the elderly mentally ill on the Northwick Park Hospital site. We understand from Northwick Park and St. Mark's NHS Trust that there are also patients occupying general medical and surgical beds of all ages, which would include a proportion of elderly people.

Doctors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each medical speciality and number of current vacancies for qualified doctors in it. [21864]

Mr. Milburn: The latest available information is shown in the table. Vacant medical posts by specialty in England on 30 September 1996:

	Number
All Specialties: Total	1,410
General Medicine Group	280
General Medicine	90
Cardiovascular Disease	20
Diabetes and Endocrinology	10
Gastroenterology	0
Renal Disease	10
Palliative Medicine	10
Respiratory Medicine	10
Geriatric Medicine	50
Audiological Medicine	0
Clinical Neurophysiology	0
Clinical Genetics	0
Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics	0
Rehabilitation Medicine	10
Dermatology	10
Medical Oncology	0
Venereology	10
Communicable Diseases	0
Neurology	20
Occupational Medicine	0
Rheumatology	20
Other	0
Paediatrics (Inc Paediatric neurology)	70
Paediatrics	70
Paediatric Neurology	0
Accident and Emergency	70
Surgical Group	280
General Surgery	80
Thoracic Surgery	0
Otolaryngology	20
Neurological Surgery	10
Ophthalmology	40
Paediatric Surgery	0
Plastic Surgery	10
Orthopaedic Surgery	90
Urology	30
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	40
Anaesthetics	180
Diagnostic Radiology Group	60
Diagnostic Radiology	60
Nuclear Medicine	0
Radiotherapy	20
Pathology Group	60
General Pathology	0
Chemical Pathology	10
Blood Transfusion	0
Haematology	10
Morbid Anatomy and Histopathology	20
Immunology	0
Medical Microbiology	10
Virology	0
Neuropathology	0
Psychiatry Group	360
Psychiatry	210
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	40
Forensic Psychiatry	20
Learning Disabilities	40
Old Age Psychiatry	50
Psychotherapy	10

Source:
The Medical and Dental Workforce Census 30 September 1996.
Notes:
1. All figures are whole-time equivalents, rounded to the nearest 10. Totals may not agree due to rounding. "O" denotes less than 10.
2. Includes consultant, staff grade, specialist registrar, senior registrar, registrar and senior house officer.

Data on vacant posts are difficult to interpret and do not necessarily imply a shortage. The census is a snap of 30 September each year. Some vacancies will be wholly or partly filled by locums. For others National Health Service trusts may find alternative ways to provide the service rather than re-advertising. The numbers give no indication of how long the post has been empty; some of these will be in the process of being filled.

Health Service Chairmen and Directors

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of remuneration for *(a)* chairmen and *(b)* non-executive directors of (i) NHS health trusts, (ii) health authorities and *(c)* NHS Executive regional committees; what plans he has to review the level of remuneration; and if he will make a statement. [22114]

Mr. Milburn: Non-executive directors on National Heath Service trusts and health authorities receive a payment of £5,000 per annum. Chairman of trusts receive rates of payment according to the annual level of turnover of the trust involved. The current rates payable are as follows:

	Turnover (£)	Rate payable (£)
Band 1	69,066,000 to 276,338,000	19,245
Band 2	28,792,000 to 68,781,000	17,145
Band 3	2,342,000 to 28,670,000	15,125

Chairmen of health authorities receive rates of payment according to the annual level of cash allocation of the health authority involved. The current rates payable are as follows:

	Cash allocation (£)	Rate payable (£)
Band 1	285,391,000 to 516,266,000	19,245
Band 2	165,198,000 to 285,027,000	17,145
Band 3	69,700,000 to 163,775,000	15,125

National Health Service Regional Chairmen receive an annual payment of £20,925.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to review the levels of remuneration for either non-executives or chairmen.

Anti-depressants

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance for doctors on the maximum length of time patients should be allowed to take SSRI anti-depressant drugs; and if he will make a statement. [21881]

Mr. Milburn: Guidance is available in the British National Formulary, which is issued twice a year, the Drugs and Therapeutics Bulletin and the Medicines Resources Centre Bulletin, which are all issued free of charge to doctors. Copies of all the publications are available in the Library.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what has been the cost to the NHS of anti-depressants prescribed in each of the last four years; and what proportion of this was attributable to SSRIs; [21879]

(2) how many anti-depressants have been prescribed by community pharmacists in England in each of the last four years; and what proportion of these were SSRIs. [21880]

Mr. Milburn: Pharmacists do not prescribe any medication on National Health Service prescription forms. The information on prescriptions written by doctors is shown in the table.

Number and net ingredient cost of prescription items dispensed for anti-depressant drugs and selective serotonin re-uptake, inhibitors (SSRIs), 1993–96

England	*1993*		*1994*		*1995*		*1996*	
Prescription items (millions)								
SSRIs	1.9	17 per cent.	2.7	23 per cent.	3.8	29 per cent.	5.1	34 per cent.
Other anti-depressants	8.9	83 per cent.	9.1	77 per cent.	9.4	71 per cent.	9.8	66 per cent.
Total for anti-depressant drugs	10.8	100 per cent.	11.8	100 per cent.	13.2	100 per cent.	15.0	100 per cent.
Net ingredient cost (£ millions)								
SSRIs	59.5	60 per cent.	76.7	65 per cent.	103.6	71 per cent.	142.3	74 per cent.
Other anti-depressants	39.3	40 per cent.	40.6	35 per cent.	43.3	29 per cent.	49.0	26 per cent.
Total for anti-depressant drugs	98.8	100 per cent.	117.2	100 per cent.	146.8	100 per cent.	191.2	100 per cent.

[1] Anti-depressant drugs are those described in the British National Formulary (BNF) section 4.3, "Anti-depressant drugs". The therapeutic classifications are based on BNF, Number 30 (September 1995).
[2] The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.
[3] The net ingredient cost refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

City Hospitals NHS Trust, Sunderland

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the names of the appointees for the remaining vacancies for non-executive directors on the board of City Hospitals NHS Trust, Sunderland; and if he will list the appointments made since October in respect of the chair and non-executive directors, indicating their *(a)* NHS experience, *(b)* previous service as non-executive and chair of an NHS trust or health authority, *(c)* present occupation, *(d)* home area or address, *(e)* term of appointment and *(f)* expected remuneration. [22048]

Mr. Milburn: The appointments made to the trust board by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the beginning of November were as follows:

Mr. David Graham—Chairman

Mr. Graham has already served one four year term as chair of the trust. He is retired, having previously been managing director of Sunderland and South Shields Water Company. He lives in Sunderland.

Mrs. Ailsa Martin—Non-Executive Director

Mrs. Martin is currently co-ordinator of the Sunderland Carers Centre. She has had no previous service on National Health Service boards and lives in Washington.

Professor Jeffrey Brown—Non-executive Director

A pharmacist by profession, Professor Brown has had no previous service on NHS boards. He is currently Deputy Chief Executive and Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Sunderland and lives in Sunderland.

Mr. Graham Morris—Non-Executive Director

Mr. Morris was employed as a Medical Laboratory Scientific Officer from 1980 to 1987. He has had no previous service on NHS boards. He is currently employed as a research assistant and constituency agent for a Member of Parliament. He lives in Seaham.

The posts attract payment of £19,285 per annum for the chairman and £5,000 for the non-executives. All the appointments are for four years. The two remaining vacancies will be filled as soon as possible.

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of the fundamental review of the functions of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work; and if he will make a statement. [22479]

General Care Council

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the consultation paper on the General Care Council will be published. [20744]

Mr. Boateng: We are today publishing the report of the review on behalf of the United Kingdom Ministers responsible for sponsoring the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

I and my hon. Friends will be considering in detail the conclusions and recommendations in the report which is the result of an extensive consultation exercise and we intend to act on the recommendations in the report designed to secure efficiency and good value for money in the way the functions are carried out.

I announced in the House on 3 July 1997, *Official Report,* columns *231–32*, our intention to establish a General Social Services Council. This was one of the matters to which the review of CCETSW was to have regard. I and my hon. Friends will be giving further thought to how best to build effective UK links on the regulation of the workforce consistent with the Government's plans for devolution. The report of the review paves the way for the establishment of a General Social Care Council (GSCC), as we now intend to call it, and makes clear the vital importance of drawing a close relationship between the regulation of training and of the workforce.

The Government have not decided that it is unnecessary to issue a further consultation document on its proposals to establish the GSCC. We intend to publish our legislative proposals in a White Paper in the spring after further discussion of the detailed issues within the Government and will all the key stakeholders. These will include service users, employers in all sectors, staff interests and professional bodies. In preparation, for and to the benefit of, the GSCC we will carry out a formal stage two of the review based on appropriate recommendations in the report to examine issues of effectiveness and value for money.

CCETSW continues to play its vital role in ensuring an appropriately qualified and trained workforce. Achieving that objective remains central to our approach, but we do not see the need for a separate body for the regulation of training in the aftermath of the establishment of the GSCC.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department issues to NHS trusts in respect of the sale of health care items normally issued free. [21905]

Mr. Milburn: Section 1 of the National Health Service Act 1977 requires that NHS services provided under the Act to NHS patients must be free of charge, except where the making and recovery of charges is expressly provided for by legislation.

AIDS

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that AIDS patients have access to the most appropriate treatment regardless of where they live. [22170]

Ms Jowell: The Government allocate substantial resources to the National Health Service for the treatment of people with HIV/AIDS. For 1997–98, the budget amounts to £199.3 million and includes an extra £14 million in response to the cost pressures following the introduction of combination antiretroviral drug therapies for people with HIV and AIDS. The budget is broadly allocated in line with where people are treated.

In 1998–99, a further £23 million has been provided in recognition of the continued cost pressures of these new therapies which are proving effective so far in delaying the progression of HIV and AIDS, £20 million of the additional funds have been distributed according to where people with HIV/AIDS live. From 1 April 1998, health authorities will therefore take responsibility for their residents who present for HIV/AIDS treatment for the first time. The remaining £3 million has been allocated to districts with the highest caseload in recognition of the extra pressures they face with regard to combination therapies.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice her Department has issued to NHS trusts on the preparation of IT systems for the year 2000. [22057]

Mr. Milburn: An initial Executive Letter EL(96)80 was issued by the National Health Service Executive in September 1996, entitled "Problems arising from the Year 2000 date change" together with guidance on what to do. Copies are available in the Library.

Further advice was issued in October 1997 in the form of EL(97)59 and HSG(97)40, which outlined urgent action to be taken by chief executives of health authorities and NHS trusts in order to prevent problems in systems and equipment which could fail as a result of the Year 2000 date change.

Guidance on managing the risks of year 2000 is being released to all NHS Year 2000 project managers at the end of December 1997.

Mental Health Tribunals

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and which, mental health tribunals are currently inquorate. [21910]

Mr. Boateng: All Mental Health Review Tribunals are held in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Drugs

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms he proposes to ensure that expensive drugs of proven clinical value are available on the basis of clinical need. [21928]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper, "The New NHS", sets out the Government's plans for the National Health Service. National Service Frameworks and clinical guidelines will be developed with the profession, and will challenge and address variations not based on the health needs and wishes of local people.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence announced in the White Paper will develop and disseminate clinical guidelines based on relevant evidence of clinical and cost-effectiveness.

It will be for individual clinicians to judge what is the best treatment for particular patients. This will provide national consistency, while still allowing appropriate local and individual responsiveness.

Social Services (Fees and Charges)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums have been raised in fees and charges by each local authority social services department in the years *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [22158]

Mr. Boateng: The table shows the amounts of income from fees and charges recorded for each local authority area for 1994–95 and 1995–96. Data are not yet available for 1996–97.

Local authority personal social services: fees and charges income
England — *£ thousands*

Social services department	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Avon	23,373	26,836
Barking and Dagenham	2,443	2,633
Barnet	4,736	6,717
Barnsley	2,596	2,770
Bedfordshire	4,602	8,958
Berkshire	11,442	16,226
Bexley	4,594	5,856
Birmingham	18,257	22,726
Bolton	2,193	4,112
Bradford	7,141	8,785
Brent	3,380	3,509
Bromley	3,076	3,209
Buckinghamshire	13,757	16,384
Bury	6,091	6,601
Calderdale	4,870	6,336
Cambridgeshire	8,331	6,977
Camden	3,966	5,377
Cheshire	18,086	18,943
City of London	215	318
Cleveland	5,088	5,559
Cornwall	3,864	4,162
Coventry	4,739	5,164
Croydon	3,249	8,452
Cumbria	10,658	12,376
Derbyshire	18,901	23,509
Devon	27,570	37,713
Doncaster	5,814	7,257
Dorset	14,012	19,845
Dudley	3,097	2,614
Durham	6,811	7,233
Ealing	2,087	1,945
East Sussex	19,273	24,812
Enfield	3,575	7,119
Essex	12,665	33,646
Gateshead	3,844	5,529
Gloucestershire	1,805	2,678
Greenwich	4,884	449
Hackney	3,072	5,195
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,182	4,302
Hampshire	27,925	34,871
Haringey	2,172	8,469
Harrow	6,304	5,967
Havering	2,729	3,457
Hereford and Worcester	15,419	16,247
Hertfordshire	31,239	20,092
Hillingdon	7,511	5,326
Hounslow	2,457	3,057
Humberside	7,129	6,830
Isle of Wight UA	2,792	4,209
Isles of Scilly	66	69
Islington	5,264	3,529
Kensington and Chelsea	2,408	2,658
Kent	31,105	38,939
Kingston upon Thames	3,601	4,280
Kirklees	6,347	8,353
Knowsley	736	760
Lambeth	2,507	5,572
Lancashire	30,351	39,021
Leeds	16,182	17,462
Leicestershire	15,409	18,603
Lewisham	5,995	6,944
Lincolnshire	4,550	5,154
Liverpool	3,326	2,490
Manchester	12,312	14,761
Merton	920	1,029
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,819	3,797
Newham	1,527	2,672
Norfolk	17,828	24,401
North Tyneside	1,848	2,122
North Yorkshire	17,301	21,520
Northamptonshire	13,624	15,581
Northumberland	6,310	8,482
Nottinghamshire	22,127	31,344
Oldham	5,555	7,368
Oxfordshire	6,245	8,035
Redbridge	3,807	3,674
Richmond upon Thames	4,298	5,047
Rochdale	560	559
Rotherham	2,474	2,989
Salford	3,331	4,205
Sandwell	5,252	8,061
Sefton	7,077	8,630
Sheffield	7,089	6,546
Shropshire	6,835	8,903
Solihull	2,149	2,536
Somerset	6,437	8,651
South Tyneside	2,205	2,481
Southwark	8,251	6,941
St. Helens	5,335	6,301
Staffordshire	16,862	24,354
Stockport	6,215	8,939
Suffolk	11,645	14,521
Sunderland	2,875	1,639
Surrey	20,042	20,132
Sutton	2,530	3,667
Tameside	7,981	7,199
Tower Hamlets	1,668	1,533
Trafford	2,980	3,605
Wakefield	3,037	1,946
Walsall	2,662	2,691

Local authority personal social services: fees and charges income

England *£ thousands*

Social services department	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Waltham Forest	343	778
Wandsworth	11,149	12,976
Warwickshire	9,882	12,743
West Sussex	12,754	25,116
Westminster	1,481	1,387
Wigan	7,562	9,150
Wiltshire	2,507	3,054
Wirral	8,624	10,379
Wolverhampton	4,664	5,950
England	844,842	1,043,586

Source: RO3.

Incontinence

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the number of people who suffer from incontinence in Coventry. [21904]

Mr. Boateng: The latest estimate of people suffering with some form of incontinence in Coventry is approximately sixteen and a half thousand.

Source: Coventry Healthcare National Health Service Trust.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug-related Offences

15. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the current prison population were convicted of a drugs-related offence. [20173]

Ms Quin: Provisional information for 31 October 1997 shows that there were 368 convicted unsentenced and 7,377 sentenced prisoners held in prisons in England and Wales for drug offences. This represents 14.3 per cent. of the convicted prison population.

29. **Mr. Woolas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the proportion of acquisitive crime which is linked to the use of illegal drugs. [20187]

Mr. George Howarth: We hope to publish early in the new year important research which indicates that there is indeed a very strong relationship between the misuse of drugs and acquisitive crime.

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to tackle the link between drugs and crime. [20155]

Mr George Howarth: A new treatment and testing order, included as one of the measures in the Crime and Disorder Bill, will give courts the power to require drug misusing offenders to undergo treatment. The new order will be rigorously enforced and include the use of drug testing to enable the courts to monitor the progress of offenders at review hearings.

In addition, a Home Office Drugs Prevention Initiative study is testing the impact of drug treatment interventions in the criminal justice system—from arrest through to sentence and beyond—to refer people with drug problems to drug treatment programmes.

Further measures are likely to be recommended by the new United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator as part of his comprehensive review of Government action against drugs, while the Home Office's research programme will continue to shed light on the nature of the links between drugs and crime and to inform action against both.

Drug Rehabilitation Establishments

18. **Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the drug rehabilitation establishments which the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) has visited since 2 May. [20176]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) today.

Community Sentencing

19. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extra work which increased use of community sentencing and electronic tagging will place on the police force. [20177]

Ms Quin: There has been no specific research to assess the impact of the increased use of community sentences. However, there is likely to be an increase in the number of warrants served by the police on offenders who have failed to comply with the conditions of an order and who have not answered a summons to appear at court in connection with breach proceedings.

Offenders who have breached the terms of their electronic tag are returned to the court by the monitoring contractors. However, if an offender then fails to appear in court, a warrant for arrest is issued. Too few such cases have arisen during the current trials of electronic monitoring to enable a meaningful estimate of police costs to be made.

Under the new Home Detention Curfew, suitable prisoners will be subjected to electronic tagging. Prisoners who breach their curfew can be returned tc custody. It is too soon to know what the possible impact on the police of this will be.

Voluntary Sector

20. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will bring forward to improve the relationship between the Government and the voluntary sector. [20178]

Mr. Michael: The Government place high priority on developing and strengthening a partnership between Government and the voluntary sector. The main vehicle for this will be a Compact between government and the voluntary sector on which we are currently collaborating with the sector and which will set out the principles which should govern the relationship.

28. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings he has had since 1 May with members of voluntary organisations to discuss assistance for the voluntary sector. [20186]

Mr. Michael: Since 1 May, when responsibility for the voluntary sector and for volunteering was returned to the Home Office, there have been well over 100 meetings with members of voluntary organisations involving myself or my right hon. Friend. We have also assisted Ministers in other Departments, notably the Department for Education and Employment, with wide ranging consultation on policies which have a direct impact on the work of voluntary organisations.

Youth Crime

21. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for reducing youth crime. [20179]

Mr. Michael: The Government's plans for reducing youth crime are set out in the White Paper "No More Excuses" which was published on 27 November. These include proposals to speed up the youth offender proceedings, replace repeat cautions with a new reprimand and Final Warning scheme, introduce new community based sentences and established a Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, and local Youth Offending Teams. A new statutory aim for the youth justice system will place a clear emphasis on preventing re-offending. These proposals are contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill currently before Parliament.

Laser Pens

22. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on the use of laser pens as weapons. [20180]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office has received 33 letters from hon. Members and 35 letters and one telephone call from members of the public.

Police Pensions

23. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the latest annual police budgets in England and Wales is allocated to meeting the cost of pensions; what was the comparable figure five years ago; and what is his estimated figure for five years ahead. [20181]

Mr. Michael: In their returns to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, police authorities in England and Wales estimated that net policy pension costs will be 11.9 per cent. of total net expenditure in 1997–98. The comparable figure for 1992–93 is 8.2 per cent. There are no estimates for five years ahead.

32. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform the police pension scheme. [20191]

Mr. Michael: An inter-Department review of police pensions has been considering whether new recruits should belong to a reformed police pension scheme and whether changes are necessary to the current medical retirement procedures. We hope to issue a consultation paper in the new year and we will invite all interested parties to contribute to the debate.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police force, the cost *(a)* in cash and *(b)* as a percentage of budget, of pension provision for each of the past five financial years, and in each case the budgets for (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000. [21932]

Mr. Michael: The information requested in respect of years 1992–93 to 1997–98 is set out in the table. Police authority budgets are set in the beginning of each year following the revenue settlement announced by the Government. Budget information for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 is therefore not available. The cost of pension provision for 1998–1999 and 1999–2000 is also not available. The costs will in part be influenced by retirements in each preceding year.

Net Police pension costs

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
	Net pension costs (£000)	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Percentage of net expenditure*
Avon and Somerset	11,145	8.7	16,100	12.0	16,969	12.0
Bedfordshire	2,723	6.0	2,792	5.7	4,252	8.3
Cambridgeshire	3,849	7.5	4,510	7.9	5,407	9.2
Cheshire	6,335	8.6	7,480	9.3	7,528	9.1
City of London	3,607	8.0	4,359	8.5	4,971	9.5
Cleveland	6,506	10.4	8,633	13.0	7,978	11.6
Cumbria	4,873	9.6	5,194	10.0	5,702	10.5
Derbyshire	6,669	8.7	7,075	9.0	7,753	9.2
Devon and Cornwall	10,981	8.5	14,038	10.2	13,930	9.9
Dorset	4,525	7.9	4,905	8.3	5,972	9.0
Durham	5,835	10.8	7,640	13.2	6,905	11.7
Dyfed Powys	3,787	9.4	4,950	11.7	5,148	11.3
Essex	8,779	6.8	9,334	6.8	n/a	—
Gloucestershire	4,198	8.5	4,607	8.9	4,805	8.7
Greater Manchester	26,238	9.3	31,509	10.3	35,158	11.0
Gwent	2,883	7.1	4,340	10.2	4,739	10.7
Hampshire	10,266	7.2	11,725	8.0	13,610	8.8
Hertfordshire	4,578	6.5	5,043	6.8	5,850	6.9
Humberside	7,483	8.6	9,890	11.0	9,189	9.9
Kent	11,807	8.7	12,488	8.7	12,510	8.1
Lancashire	13,589	10.3	18,066	12.7	16,771	11.6
Leicestershire	7,788	10.3	8,516	10.9	10,129	12.5

Net Police pension costs

	1992–93		1993–94		1994–95	
	Net pension costs (£000)	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Percentage of net expenditure*
Lincolnshire	4,836	9.1	5,540	9.9	n/a	—
Merseyside	19,807	10.2	23,908	11.5	26,041	12.1
Metropolitan Police	107,984	7.1	120,953	7.8	154,666	9.7
Norfolk	4,404	7.3	5,401	8.4	6,897	10.1
North Wales	5,166	9.0	5,927	9.9	5,771	9.2
North Yorkshire	7,150	11.9	10,345	16.3	8,946	14.0
Northamptonshire	3,930	7.5	4,407	8.0	6,107	10.1
Northumbria	15,528	10.6	18,218	11.4	19,933	11.3
Nottinghamshire	8,214	8.8	10,240	10.4	11,397	10.7
South Wales	10,794	8.3	10,655	8.0	14,513	10.9
South Yorkshire	10,612	8.7	11,782	9.1	11,121	8.1
Staffordshire	10,894	12.0	12,714	13.1	11,610	11.6
Suffolk	3,548	6.8	5,435	9.8	5,872	10.3
Surrey	5,770	8.1	5,992	8.0	7,318	8.7
Sussex	11,241	9.6	12,218	10.0	12,704	9.7
Thames Valley Police	8,660	5.2	11,625	6.5	12,687	6.6
Warwickshire	2,253	5.1	3,483	7.3	4,180	8.4
West Mercia	5,532	6.5	7,076	7.7	9,489	9.7
West Midlands	22,210	7.7	24,164	8.1	29,945	9.6
West Yorkshire	20,588	9.5	25,959	11.4	27,367	11.6
Wiltshire	3,259	6.3	3,535	6.5	4,143	7.0
Total	460,824	8.2	542,771	9.2	595,983	10.0

n/a=not available.

Net police pension costs

	1995–96		1996–97		1997–98		
	Net pensions costs (£000)	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Budget (£000)*	*Percentage of budget*
Avon and Somerset	17,780	12.6	22,452	14.5	24,741	160,637	15.4
Bedfordshire	4,890	9.0	5,451	9.5	5,997	59,787	10.0
Cambridgeshire	5,871	9.6	7,280	11.0	8,597	69,030	12.5
Cheshire	10,074	11.5	9,824	10.1	9,470	102,398	9.2
City of London	6,848	12.2	7,247	12.1	7,205	61,687	11.7
Cleveland	7,950	11.6	10,346	13.5	9,451	76,177	12.4
Cumbria	6,145	11.5	7,511	12.9	8,138	60,301	13.5
Derbyshire	10,416	12.1	11,073	12.0	12,430	96,340	12.9
Devon and Cornwall	17,661	12.2	17,926	11.7	20,343	159,570	12.7
Dorset	6,947	11.0	7,618	11.2	8,225	70,772	11.6
Durham	7,218	11.6	10,078	14.3	9,121	74,148	12.3
Dyfed Powys	7,036	15.2	6,379	13.1	6,519	50,481	12.9
Essex	14,045	9.6	14,809	9.6	16,300	159,512	10.2
Gloucestershire	5,635	10.4	6,892	11.8	8,489	60,814	14.0
Greater Manchester	43,809	13.2	45,286	13.2	50,089	355,633	14.1
Gwent	3,695	8.3	8,410	13.6	8,144	65,162	12.5
Hampshire	17,316	10.6	15,633	8.9	18,499	182,513	10.1
Hertfordshire	6,060	6.9	6,701	7.4	8,421	93,989	9.0
Humberside	11,228	11.6	11,706	11.4	12,428	107,052	11.6
Kent	15,046	9.7	19,191	11.7	19,427	170,625	11.4
Lancashire	19,662	12.9	22,482	13.7	22,650	169,841	13.3
Leicestershire	10,888	12.5	12,400	13.1	11,754	98,529	11.9
Lincolnshire	7,786	13.2	8,267	13.1	8,546	65,776	13.0
Merseyside	29,934	13.6	33,147	14.7	39,256	235,027	16.7
Metropolitan Police	150,347	9.2	156,582	9.3	172,780	1,705,000	10.1
Norfolk	8,489	12.1	10,639	14.0	11,376	79,011	14.4
North Wales	7,489	11.4	7,956	11.5	10,223	72,039	14.2
North Yorkshire	8,459	13.4	11,038	15.8	11,976	72,426	16.5
Northamptonshire	5,470	9.6	6,310	10.2	6,937	64,443	10.8
Northumbria	26,636	14.9	26,220	13.9	28,670	195,289	14.7
Nottinghamshire	11,732	11.0	13,144	11.4	14,651	119,682	12.2
South Wales	18,828	13.0	19,667	13.0	22,745	156,800	14.5
South Yorkshire	12,700	8.8	15,927	10.2	16,700	160,673	10.4
Staffordshire	11,377	11.5	14,190	12.9	15,446	114,150	13.5
Suffolk	7,137	12.8	8,494	13.6	8,550	64,214	13.3
Surrey	7,803	9.4	9,566	11.0	10,414	90,727	11.5
Sussex	17,438	12.7	18,680	12.5	22,624	157,390	14.4
Thames Valley Police	15,992	8.2	16,244	7.9	18,733	212,162	8.8
Warwickshire	5,004	10.5	5,253	10.6	6,191	51,451	12.0
West Mercia	8,875	9.3	10,535	10.2	11,496	107,701	10.7

Net police pension costs

	1995–96		1996–97		1997–98		
	Net pensions costs (£000)	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Percentage of net expenditure*	*Net pension costs (£000)*	*Budget (£000)*	*Percentage of budget*
West Midlands	34,304	10.4	40,305	11.7	42,150	357,166	11.8
West Yorkshire	25,775	10.8	30,677	11.7	34,259	270,660	12.7
Wiltshire	4,032	7.4	7,496	12.1	6,431	63,980	10.1
Total	681,827	10.8	757,032	11.3	826,592	6,920,658	11.9

Parliamentary Elections

24. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the commission established to inquire into alternative voting systems for parliamentary elections. [20182]

Mr. Straw: The Independent Commission on the Voting System will begin its work early in the new year and has been asked to report within 12 months.

Closed Circuit Television

25. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority he plans to give to spending on closed circuit television after 1998. [20183]

Mr. Michael: In total, £9 million will be spent on CCTV in 1998–99 financial year. Plans and priorities for spending thereafter are being examined in the Comprehensive Spending Review of all public expenditure, with a view to ensuring that taxpayers' money is being spent effectively in order to meet the Government's manifesto commitments.

European Parliament Elections

26. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that voters have the right to vote for an individual candidate in elections to the European Parliament. [20184]

Mr. George Howarth: We believe that the simple list system that the European Parliamentary Elections Bill provides for is the most appropriate electoral system for elections to the European Parliament. However, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said that he is prepared to consider the arguments for introducing a system in which voters can vote either for a party list or for an individual candidate on the list.

Police (Surrey)

27. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of future police numbers in Surrey. [20185]

Mr. Michael: Under legislation passed by the previous Government in 1994, it is for the Chief Constable of Surrey to determine the number of police officers in the force on the basis of the resources available to him. Ministers have no direct control over police numbers. I understand there were 1,608 police officers in Surrey at the end of September, 98 fewer than in March 1992.

Bribery

30. **Mr. Fizpatrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make bribery of hon. Members an offence. [20188]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government are committed to tackling all forms of corruption, including the bribery of hon. Members. My right hon. Friend expects to make a statement on the reform of the law in this area early next year, taking account of the results of the consultation exercise which he launched in June and of proposals which the Law Commission are preparing and which are awaited. He will also take account of any further recommendations which the Committee on Standards in Public Life might make and of the views of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege.

Witnesses (Protection)

31. **Mr. Cawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that vulnerable witnesses are afforded greater protection in court. [20189]

Mr. Michael: On 13 June, we announced an urgent, wide ranging review of the way in which vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, including those with communication or learning difficulties, are treated by the criminal justice system, with the aim of assisting them to give their best evidence in court. The Interdepartmental Working Group, which is taking forward the review, will report to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary shortly and its report will be considered by Ministers as soon as possible in the New Year.

Human Rights

33. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement the incorporation of the European convention on human rights. [20192]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Human Rights Bill [*Lords*] is currently being considered in another place. Before it can be implemented (if enacted), we shall need to ensure that courts and tribunals receive adequate training to enable them to deal confidently with Convention points in the cases that come before them.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate which clauses in the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*] require the court to produce a decision on the morality of the conduct in any case in addition to its compliance with the bare letter of the law. [21926]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Whether morality becomes involved may be a moot point, depending on the definition of morality. It is arguable that morality has a role in non-convention judgments in our courts.

Clause 2 of the Bill requires courts to take Convention jurisprudence into account when determining a question which has arisen in connection with a Convention right.

Clause 3 requires legislation to be interpreted as far as possible in a way which is compatible with the Convention rights. Clause 6 makes it unlawful for a court, as a public authority, to act in a way which is incompatible with the Convention rights. Taken together, these provisions will require the courts to consider whether, for example, conduct which interferes with a Convention right is necessary in a democratic society for one of the reasons specified in the relevant Article of the Convention.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to issue guidance to assist the courts in reaching judgments on the morality of conduct in any case when interpreting the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*] should it become law. [21925]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Judicial training in the provisions of the Bill, relating among other things to the interpretation of Convention jurisprudence, is a matter for the Judicial Studies Board.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the bodies which the Government deem to be public authorities in the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*]. [21927]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Clause 6 of the Human Rights Bill makes it unlawful for a public authority to act in a way which is incompatible with the convention rights. It provides that a public authority includes a court or tribunal, and any person certain of whose functions are functions of a public nature. My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor explained during Committee stage in another place why we had adopted this approach rather than having a list of public authorities.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what considerations he bases his policy that the absence of written guarantees of freedom acts as a serious threat to liberty. [21924]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We believe that the absence of written guarantees of freedom is a more serious threat to liberty than their presence. The freedom of an individual to do anything which is not prohibited by law provides inadequate protection against the misuse of power by the State. It has failed to protect a number of people in cases in which the European Court of Human Rights has found a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights by the United Kingdom.

Our policy is to make it possible for laws and practices in the United Kingdom to be tested in our own courts for compatibility with the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights. We have set out the considerations which have led us to this view in the White Paper "Rights Brought Home" (Cm 3782).

Racial Violence

34. **Mr. Tims:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of racial violence have been recorded in each of the last five years. [20193]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The total number of racial incidents recorded by the police in England and Wales for the last five years were:

	Number
1992	7,734
1993–94	11,006
1994–95	11,878
1995–96	12,222
1996–97	13,151

These are incidents recorded under the Association of Chief Police Officers' definition of a racial incident:
"any incident in which it appears to the reporting or investigating officer that the complaint involves an element of racial motivation, or any incident which includes an allegation of racial motivation made by any person".

Under data collection requirements agreed by member states within Europe, figures giving details of the numbers of serious racial incidents have been submitted to the European Union for 1994–95 and 1995–96. The 1994–95 figures showed that, of the 11,878 racial incidents recorded by the police, 564 were in respect of serious crime. Of these, four were murders; three were attempted murders; 161 were attacks involving explosives/arson and 396 were serious assaults. In 1995–96, of the 12,222 racial incidents recorded by the police, 440 were in respect of serious crime. Of these, two were murders; 163 were attacks involving explosives/arson; and 275 were serious assaults.

Shotguns

35. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce tighter controls on the ownership of shotguns. [20194]

Mr. Michael: The Government have made it clear that once the complete ban on handguns has been achieved, we shall consider whether further steps are required to secure public safety. We will consult widely with all interested parties if further steps are considered necessary but we have no preconceived ideas on shotguns or any other specific firearms.

Police and Probation Services (Surrey)

36. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet representatives from the Surrey police and probation services to discuss proposed funding levels. [20195]

Mr. Michael: I wrote to the Chairman of Surrey Police Authority on 14 November 1997 offering to meet representatives to discuss proposed funding levels for 1998–99. We have had no similar request from Surrey Probation Service for a meeting.

Immigration and Asylum Cases (Judicial Review)

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* statistics his Department collates and *(b)* estimates he has made in respect of the number of (i) applications for leave to apply for judicial review in immigration and asylum cases that were received in the Queen's Bench Divisional Court indicating which (1) were allowed, (2) were refused and (3) lapsed

and (ii) substantive applications for judicial review in immigration and asylum cases that were disposed of by the Divisional Court indicating those applications that were (A) allowed, (B) dismissed and (C) withdrawn in (x) 1996 and (y) 1997; and if he will list the proportion of applications in which his Department conceded the matters at issue prior to the court hearing. [21321]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information is given in the table. Reliable information regarding the proportion of applications conceded by the Home Office can be obtained only through examination of individual case records and is therefore available only at disproportional cost.

Applications for leave to apply for judicial review and applications for judicial review, made in respect of immigration cases[1] 1996 and 1 January to 31 October 1997

	Applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review				*Applications for Judicial Review determined by the court*				
					Single judge		*Divisional court*		
	Total received	*Allowed*	*Refused*	*Lapsed*[2]	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Total withdrawn*
1996	1,748	301	522	480	130	41	1	1	105
1997 January to October	1,572	338	435	749	146	33	—	2	120

[1] Includes asylum and non-asylum immigration cases.
[2] This figure is applications refused but not renewed, leave granted but no notice of motion lodged and applications withdrawn or otherwise not proceeded with at this stage.

Anti-social Behaviour

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is proposing to tackle anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement. [21396]

Mr. Michael: The Government regard anti-social behaviour and the harassment or intimidation of neighbours as completely unacceptable. The Crime and Disorder Bill contains provisions to enable the police or a local authority to apply for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order prohibiting an individual from behaving in this way. Breach of the order will be a criminal offence.

The Bill also contains provisions for police and local authorities together to identify and tackle local problems of crime and disorder.

Evidence

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the operation of section 32 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 in respect of provision for the attendance of witnesses to be dispensed with in certain cases and for evidence to be given by way of a television link; and what plans he has to extend its provisions to cover other classes or proceedings. [21512]

Mr. Michael: An independent evaluation of the provisions for the use of television links for child witnesses was conducted on behalf of the Home Office in 1991 by Professor Graham Davies and Elizabeth Noon of Leicester University who concluded that the live link had a positive and facilitating effect on the courtroom testimony of children. Section 32 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which allowed children under 14 years of age to give evidence by way of live television links, was extended by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to include children under 17 years of age in cases involving sexual assault. The possible further extension of its use is one of the issues being considered by the inter-departmental working group on vulnerable or intimidated witnesses which was announced by my right hon. Friend on 13 June.

Police (Body Armour)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with chief constables concerning the wearing of body armour by police officers; and if he will make a statement. [21579]

Mr. Michael: Decisions about whether to issue body armour, and the selection of body armour, are operational matters for chief officers. The role of the Home Office is to ensure that, in making such decisions, they have before them the best available expert advice, and this is provided by the Home Office's Police Scientific Development Branch which also provides expert advice to the self-defence committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Both my right hon. Friend and I take an interest in such matters when we meet chief constables and other police officers. In particular, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed my right hon. Friend about the position in the Metropolitan Police during discussions with my right hon. Friend in his capacity as police authority for the Metropolitan Police. The Police Scientific Development Branch has, in collaboration with the Association of Chief Police Officers, issued a manual to all chief police officers containing guidance on how to select body armour, and expert evaluations of a wide range of body armour. The manual is updated to keep abreast of the latest technical developments and to assist individual chief officers in their decision making.

Sexual and Violent Offences

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effect on victims of serious sexual offences of being asked questions by the defendant personally in the course of a trial. [21515]

Mr. Michael: There has been no specific or separate research on this issue but research into the process of rape cases is currently under way. It is often a particularly frightening and traumatic experience for the victims of serious sexual offences to have to give evidence. Ministers have expressed concern about the additional impact of extended questioning by the defendant

personally, while appreciating the need to protect the right of the defence to test the evidence against him. This issue is currently being considered by the inter-departmental review of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses which was announced by my right hon. Friend on 13 June 1997.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Flynn) of 21 July 1997, *Official Report*, column 389, when he expects his Department's research into the process of rape cases to be completed; and if he will publish it. [21578]

Mr. Michael: The research into the processing of rape cases by the criminal justice system, being undertaken by the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, is expected to be completed in the second half of 1998. The findings will be published.

An interim report from the study, setting out the emerging findings from the first stage of the study, has already been placed in the Library.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offenders *(a)* in total and *(b)* aged under 21 years convicted of (i) rape and (ii) attempted rape received sentences of more than three months but less than four years' imprisonment in the last year for which figures are available: [21573]

(2) how many offenders aged under 21 years and convicted of offences involving *(a)* sex and *(b)* violence were sentenced to detention in a young offenders' institution for periods of more than three months but less than four years in the last year for which figures are available. [21574]

(3) how many offenders convicted of offences involving *(a)* sex and *(b)* violence were sentenced to periods of imprisonment of more than three months but less than four years in the last year for which figures are available. [21513]

Mr. Michael: The information is given in the table.

Court data, England and Wales 1996

Offenders/type of offence	*Total convictions*	*Total sentenced to immediate custody*[1]	*Custodial sentence of over three months but less than four years*
All ages			
Indictable sexual offences	4,426	2,439	1,535
of which:			
Rape	510	454	42
Attempted rape	66	57	19
Indictable violence against the person offence group	30,011	9,147	6,260
Aged under 21			
Indictable sexual offences	657	133	91
of which:			
Rape	74	30	7
Attempted rape	13	7	5
Indictable violence against the person offence group	10,299	2,287	1,613

[1] Includes unsuspended imprisonment and for persons aged under 21 detention in a young offender institution.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the willingness of victims of serious sexual offences to come forward with complaints and co-operate in criminal proceedings. [21510]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate is undertaking a study into the processing of rape cases after they have been reported to the police. This study updates a previous Home Office study of rape cases reported to the police in 1985, the results of which were published in 1992. A copy of the interim report on this study has already been placed in the Library and this shows that the withdrawal of the allegation by the victim is one of the significant reasons for rape cases failing to be prosecuted. The final stages of the research will explore the reasons for withdrawal or other failure to proceed with a case.

The Research and Statistics Directorate has also recently conducted a literature review to support the work of the inter-departmental working group which is looking at ways of assisting vulnerable witnesses, including victims of serious sexual offences. This review will be published in 1998 as part of the working group's report.

The British Crime Survey has always included measurement of sexual victimisation among women and whether incidents were reported to the police or not. However, a new self-completion approach was tried in the 1994 sweep, to overcome obvious measurement problems. The findings of this study were published in the international journal "Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention" (Volume 6 No. 2 1997). The sexual victimisation self-completion component will be repeated in the 1998 British Crime Survey. This time, both men and women will be asked about their experiences of sexual crimes.

It must be acknowledged that research in this area is difficult to conduct because:

(a) of the sensitive nature of the offences;

(b) of difficulties in identifying victims of unreported offences;

(c) reasons for not reporting or not co-operating in criminal proceedings may also be reasons for not co-operating with research in this area.

Ministers are determined to do everything possible to get a true picture of the problem and to make the system more accessible, sympathetic and effective in dealing with these crimes.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many defendants convicted of *(a)* rape or attempted rape, *(b)* indecent assault on a woman *(c)* and other sexual offences to which part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 applies, personally asked questions of their victim in the course of their trial. [21514]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not collected centrally. The Government's manifesto included a commitment to provide greater protection for victims in rape and serious sexual offence trials. On 13 June, my right hon. Friend announced the establishment of an inter-departmental review to improve the way in which such persons are treated within the criminal justice system and this includes the consideration of ways of preventing unrepresented defendants from personally cross-examining the victim.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to prevent defendants personally cross-examining victims in the course of trials involving serious sexual offences. [21921]

Mr. Michael: This issue is currently being considered by the inter-departmental review of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses which was announced by my right hon. Friend on 13 June 1997.

Exclusion Orders

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders under the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Persons) Act 1980 have been applied for and granted by the magistrate's courts in each year since 1992. [21852]

Mr. Michael: The imposition of exclusion orders under the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Persons) Act 1980 is at the discretion of the courts when an offender is convicted of an offence committed in licensed premises and the court is satisfied that in committing that offence he resorted, or offered or threatened to resort, to violence. The imposition of such an order is not dependent upon an application by another person.

Home Office figures show that the following number of exclusion orders was imposed by magistrates' courts in each year since 1992:

1992: 58
1993: 45
1994: 21
1995: 21
1996: 23

On 15 October, we issued a circular reminding the courts of their powers under the Act to impose exclusion orders on offenders.

Female Prisoners

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons and young offenders institutions in England and Wales were holding females aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18 years of age on the last date for which figures are available. [21601]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The information requested as at 30 November 1997 is given in the table.

Prison Service establishments holding 16, 17 and 18-year-old females on 30 November 1991[1]

	Number
AGE 16	
Local prisons	
Holloway	1
Closed training prisons	
Brockhill	2
Highpoint	3
Open prisons	
Askham Grange	2
Closed young offenders institutions	
Bullwood Hall	4
New Hall	14
Styal	3
Open young offenders institutions	
Drake Hall	1
Total	30
AGE 17	
Local prisons	
Eastwood Park	1
Holloway	8
Low Newton	2
New Hall	1
Risley	1
Closed Training Prisons	
Brockhill	2
Bullwood Hall	1
Highpoint	3
Open prisons	
Askham Grange	2
Closed young offenders institutions	
Bullwood Hall	8
New Hall	13
Styal	3
Open young offenders institutions	
Drake Hall	2
Total	47
AGE 18	
Local prisons	
Eastwood Park	6
Holloway	17
Low Newton	3
New Hall	1
Risley	5
Closed training prisons	
Brockhill	3
Bullwood Hall	1
Highpoint	3
Styal	1
Open prisons	
Askham Grange	5
Closed young offenders institutions	
Bullwood Hall	11
New Hall	19
Styal	4
Open young offender institutions	
Drake Hall	7
East Sutton Park	1
Total	87

[1] Provisional figures.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will collate crime statistics by parliamentary constituency. [21676]

Mr. Michael: It is not practical for the Home Office to collate recorded crime statistics in this way. The statistics which are collected centrally are supplied by individual police forces for the whole of their own force area. Many forces break down statistics for their own purposes into

smaller areas such as the division or sub-division, but these do not necessarily equate to parliamentary constituency boundaries. In some cases, it may be possible for such local information to be used as "building blocks" for a constituency profile. Some forces do use geographical software to "map" incidents and offences within their area for a variety of purposes. In the future, such analysis of data will become increasingly important in informing the local crime and disorder audit work of police and local authorities in preparation for their joint responsibilities as proposed in the Crime and Disorder Bill.

Prison Visitors (Drug Offences)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those arrested in relation to possible drug-related offences while visiting prisons were *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted of a criminal offence arising there from in the most recent year for which figures are available. [21616]

Mr. Michael: The court proceedings data which are collected centrally do identify convictions for offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, as amended, but they do not identify the charge originally made nor the location of the offence.

Young Prisoners

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls aged under 18 years are currently in (i) prison and (ii) young offenders' institutions following (1) sentence and (2) remand into custody; and what is the projected under 18 prison and young offender institution population on 1 January 1998. [21536]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 18 December 1997]:* The information requested about the current prison population is given in the table.

The number of male young offenders (aged under 21 years) in prison is expected to be 10,400 (7,700 sentenced, 2,700 remand) on 31 December 1997. Monthly projections are not prepared for the under-18 prison population, but during the financial year 1997–98, the population of male prisoners under 18 years is estimated to average 2,500 (1,700 sentenced, 800 remand). There is no separate projection for female young offenders.

Population of persons aged under 18 in prisons in England and Wales on 30 November 1997 by type of custody[1]

	Type of prison	
Sex/type of custody	*Prison*	*Young Offender Institution*
Male		
Remand	[2]610	153
Sentenced	88	1,568
Female		
Remand	9	5
Sentenced	5	67

[1] Provisional figures

[2] Most are held in remand facilities for young offenders only.

Road Policing

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make road policing a national core policing objective. [21680]

Mr. Michael: It is not the purpose of the national key objectives for the police to provide a list of all the essential services and tasks of the Police Service and currently I have no plans to make traffic policing the subject of a key objective. When my right hon. Friend wrote to chief constables on 3 November to announce the key objectives for 1998–99, he stressed that traffic policing is a central part of the police's responsibilities and is expected to play a full part in achieving the overall objectives for the police service, particularly in relation to community safety and crime reduction and in achieving a safer environment on the roads.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* asylum appeals and *(b)* other immigration appeals are currently outstanding. [21629]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As at 30 November 1997, an estimated 37,000 immigration appeals, excluding dependants, were awaiting determination. Of these, approximately 25,750 were asylum-related appeals and 11,250 were in connection with other immigration cases.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the statutory authority which permits the police to share personal data with local authorities and vice versa; and if he will make a statement. [22129]

Mr. Michael: There is no general statutory power to disclose personal data. Where the police consider that it is in the interests of the prevention or detection of crime that personal data should be disclosed, they may do so under common law powers. General guidance to the police service on the disclosure of such data is given in the Code of Practice for Data Protection produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

We intend to issue next year inter-departmental guidance, to local authorities among others, which will cover the disclosure of personal information.

Local authorities may wish to reach agreements with the police on the disclosure of personal data. Such agreements must operate within the terms of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has signed a certificate under the provisions of section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 with respect to those personal data which are used by the Security Service to help the police fight serious crime. [22136]

Mr. Straw: No. I have had no occasion to do so.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Security Service will adopt the relevant sections of the Code of Practice on Data Protection

published by the Association of Chief Police Officers in respect of those personal data which are used by the service to help the police fight serious crime. [22137]

Mr. Straw: The arrangements under which the Security Service discharges its responsibilities in relation to protection of data are a matter for the Director General of the Security Service. I see no reason to require the Security Service to adopt in whole or in part a Code of Practice intended to deal with arrangements for data protection within police forces.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government policy towards access to criminal records with particular reference to *(a)* the availability of a criminal conviction certificate under section 112 of the Police Act 1997 and *(b)* enforced subject access. [22133]

Mr. Michael: We are currently reviewing the provisions relating to criminal records checks in Part V of the Police Act 1997. Our top priority in doing so is the protection of children and other vulnerable people. We shall consider criminal conviction certificates as part of this review.

The White Paper "Data Protection: The Government's Proposals" made it clear that the Government intend to put an end to the practice of enforced subject access.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigation the Security Service has conducted into whether it holds personal data for purposes unconnected with a national security purpose. [22135]

Mr. Straw: The Director General of the Security Service is under a statutory duty to ensure that no information is obtained by the Service except so far as necessary for the proper discharge of its functions. The functions of the Service are to protect national security; to safeguard the economic well-being of the United Kingdom against threats posed by the actions or intentions of persons outside the British Islands and to act in support of the activities of police forces and other law enforcement agencies in the prevention and detection of serious crime. It follows that the Service may hold personal data which it has obtained in pursuit of any of these functions.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the review into whether the Security Service should register under the Data Protection Act 1984 began; and when it is expected to be concluded. [22134]

Mr. Straw: A review was begun in autumn 1996. It was subsumed in the consideration of plans for fresh data protection legislation to implement the European Community Data Protection Directive. The Government's Bill to implement that Directive will come before Parliament in the new year.

Passports (Processing)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state for each year since 1992 the average period between the receipt of a passport application and the provision of a passport in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [22022]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information is not available to answer the question by country. The list shows the average time it has taken the UK Passport Agency to process all straightforward, properly completed applications made in the United Kingdom in each year (commencing on 1 April) since 1992.

1992–93: nine working days;
1993–94: eight working days;
1994–95: seven working days;
1995–96: six working days;
1996–97: six working days.

The average so far for 1997–98 is nine working days due to an unexpectedly high demand.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1992 the number of *(a)* passports lost and *(b)* other official documents lost, in the passport offices of (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland. [22023]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information on passports and other official documents lost in the UK Passport Agency's offices are not separately recorded, but the incidence of such loss is comparatively rare. Lost passports and documents submitted in support of passport applications are replaced free of charge to the applicant.

Deportations

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons aged over 65 years *(a)* had their application to remain in the United Kingdom refused, *(b)* were ordered to be deported and *(c)* were deported, in each of the last five years. [21843]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* The available information on refusals of applications for leave to remain, deportation orders made and deportation removals are given in the table. The numbers removed do not include persons removed as illegal entrants or under port procedures.

Table 1: Refusals of leave to remain and deportation action taken against persons aged over 65 years[1], 1994 to 1997[2]

	1994	*1995*	*1996*	*[2]1997*
Refusals of leave to remain[3]	290	360	310	170
Deportation order made[4]	9	17	24	5
Persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process[5,6,7]	12	20	22	8

[1] Covers persons aged over 65 years when their application for leave to remain was refused or when the relevant deportation action took place.
[2] Provisional figures for January to September 1997.
[3] Rounded estimates (excluding any dependants).
[4] In 7 of these cases the deportation order was later revoked.
[5] Includes 24 persons who departed voluntarily after the deportation action had been initiated.
[6] Excludes persons removed as illegal entrants or under port procedures.
[7] Some removals may relate to deportation orders make in previous periods.

Organised Crime

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made in the

implementation of each of the recommendations in the Action Plan Against Organised Crime adopted by the European Council in June. [21706]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* The Action Plan contains 30 individual recommendations with target dates ranging from the end of 1997 to the end of 1999. Work has begun on many, but it would be premature to report on progress with each of them now. It will be an important task under the forthcoming United Kingdom Presidency to prepare the progress report that the European Council has requested for its meeting in Cardiff in June. Particular achievements under the Luxembourg Presidency have been:

- the establishment of a new multidisciplinary group on organised crime to drive this work forward (recommendation 22)
- finalisation of the Naples II Convention on Customs co-operation (recommendation 14)
- agreement in principle of a funding programme for the fight against organised crime, the Falcone Programme (recommendation 11)

Substantial progress has also been made with a joint action on criminalisation of participation in a criminal organisation (recommendation 17), arrangements for mutual evaluation (recommendation 15) and the establishment of a judicial co-operation network (recommendation 25).

Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the Instructions to Immigration Service and Home Office staff on dealing with immigration cases. [21699]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* It is my intention to make these instructions available as soon as possible in the new year. There is a considerable amount of material, extending to many volumes, and we are examining how it can be disclosed. It is likely that a text will be made available in the Library and, given the amount of material, we are considering whether, if possible, to make it available on the Internet for ease of access. This will be a substantial step in Open Government within the terms of the Code of Practice on Open Government.

Animal Experimentation

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many animals, of which species, have been used for military research under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 for *(a)* testing submarine escape mechanisms *(b)* training bomb disposal experts and *(c)* research into Gulf War Syndrome in the last five years; what is the nature of the procedures involved; and what is their severity rating. [22037]

Mr. George Howarth: Military research is not a category of work permissible under section 5(3) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. I understand, however, from the Ministry of Defence that the Environmental Sciences Department of Defence Evaluation and Research Agency carries out research aimed at providing the Royal Navy with advice on the safe pressure exposure limits for escape from a sunken submarine. The procedures used are exposure to altered environmental pressure and gaseous pressure and are of moderate severity. The species of animal used is the goat.

The number of animals used in the past five years is:

1993: 44
1994: 14
1995: 10
1996: 2
1997: 17

No training with the Armed Forces which involves the experimental use of animals is undertaken. The Defence Animal Centre at Melton Mowbray trains animals for military duties, including dogs used for search and patrol duties. This training is not for scientific or experimental purposes and so is not regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. There has been no research involving the use of animals specifically directed at Gulf War illnesses.

Police Officers

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by police force the number of *(a)* constables, *(b)* sergeants and *(c)* other ranks in post on 2 May. [22090]

Mr. Michael: The information collected centrally on police numbers relates to officers in post at the end of March and September each year. The table shows police numbers by rank in each force as at 31 March 1997.

Police strength in England and Wales

Total strength for ordinary duty as at 31 March 1997[1]

Police force	*Constable*	*Sergeant*	*Other ranks*	*Total police ranks*
Avon and Somerset	2,314.80	454.00	220.00	2,988.80
Bedfordshire	846.10	155.50	92.00	1,093.60
Cambridgeshire	1,001.00	207.00	94.00	1,302.00
Cheshire	1,589.52	308.00	148.00	2,045.52
City of London	655.94	122.00	81.00	858.94
Cleveland	1,121.46	223.80	114.00	1,459.26
Cumbria	881.50	176.00	86.00	1,143.50
Derbyshire	1,376.00	273.60	141.00	1,790.60
Devon and Cornwall	2,233.50	413.00	218.00	2,864.50
Dorset	969.00	201.00	114.00	1,284.00
Durham	1,130.00	210.50	120.00	1,460.50
Dyfed Powys	755.50	173.00	76.00	1,004.50
Essex	2,269.33	469.40	222.00	2,960.73
Gloucestershire	872.00	169.60	91.00	1,132.60
Greater Manchester	5,341.90	1,020.70	559.00	6,921.60
Gwent	964.00	198.00	81.00	1,243.00
Hampshire	2,698.19	509.47	244.00	3,451.66
Hertfordshire	1,364.54	248.55	146.00	1,759.09
Humberside	1,582.35	298.60	164.00	2,044.95
Kent	2,554.06	463.00	243.00	3,260.06
Lancashire	2,492.48	503.00	252.00	3,247.48
Leicestershire	1,555.72	257.05	136.00	1,948.77
Lincolnshire	920.70	182.70	93.00	1,196.40
Merseyside	3,272.40	656.00	302.00	4,230.40
Metropolitan Police	20,671.42	4,218.48	1,787.40	26,677.30
Norfolk	1,133.25	195.35	103.00	1,431.60
Northamptonshire	931.08	168.00	77.60	1,176.68
Northumbria	2,884.95	516.80	275.00	3,676.75
North Wales	1,024.00	224.00	121.00	1,369.00
North Yorkshire	1,017.63	216.00	104.00	1,337.63
Nottinghamshire	1,821.85	331.00	170.50	2,323.35
South Wales	2,259.85	473.00	243.00	2,975.85
South Yorkshire	2,435.65	473.00	250.00	3,158.65
Staffordshire	1,683.90	344.20	183.00	2,211.10
Suffolk	921.70	169.00	89.00	1,179.70
Surrey	1,240.14	244.90	134.50	1,619.54
Sussex	2,374.30	476.60	234.00	3,084.90
Thames Valley	2,858.00	542.30	294.70	3,695.00
Warwickshire	707.85	141.00	77.00	925.85
West Mercia	1,563.08	305.10	172.00	2,040.18

Police strength in England and Wales
Total strength for ordinary duty as at 31 March 1997[1]

Police force	*Constable*	*Sergeant*	*Other ranks*	*Total police ranks*
West Midlands	5,636.41	974.25	502.00	7,112.66
West Yorkshire	4,105.90	725.90	377.00	5,208.80
Wiltshire	881.20	179.10	94.00	1,154.30
Total all forces	96,914.14	18,811.45	9,325.70	125,051.29

[1] Full-time equivalents.

Handguns

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured by (i) legally owned handguns and (ii) handguns illegally owned or used in each police force area in England and Wales in each year since 1992; and for how many deaths and injuries it has not been determined whether the handgun used was legally or illegally held. [21838]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* In the past, information as to whether or not firearms used in offences were held legally has not been collected centrally as a matter of routine in England and Wales. A special exercise was conducted last year to find out whether the guns used in homicide were licensed or not. This covered the years 1992 to 1994, and out of a total of 90 homicides involving the use of a handgun, information was available in 62 cases to show that four were held legally and 58 held illegally by the suspect. The latter figure would, of course, include any handguns used in homicide which had been stolen from a legal owner.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many handguns were illegally taken from *(a)* firearms dealers, *(b)* police, *(c)* the armed forces, *(d)* members of the public, *(e)* a common carrier while in transit and *(f)* firearms clubs, for each year from 1992 to the latest available date and for each police force area; what was the largest number taken at any one time; and what were the descriptions of the firearms taken as recorded by the police. [21839]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested. The information that is collected and published shows the number of notifiable offences of burglary and theft recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been stolen by type of principal weapon and location. (This is in table 3.12 of Chapter 3, "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales"—copies of which are in the Library).

From 1996, the basis of the figures was changed to show the number of weapons misappropriated (defined as stolen, obtained by fraud or forgery etc., or handled dishonestly). Such figures by individual police force area could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many handguns taken from their legal owners in each year since 1992 in each police force area were subsequently recovered by the police; how many in each such area in each year are known to have been used in the commission of armed crime; and what percentage these figures represent of total thefts of handguns and of total crime in which handguns are known or believed to be used. [21836]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* The information requested is not available centrally. However, research published by the Home Office in 1994, based on investigations into 643 offences in which firearms were misappropriated in 1992, showed that about one in six of those stolen was recovered by the police. The limited evidence provided by this study suggested that 9 per cent. of the recovered firearms were known to have been used in crime (although others may have been). Virtually all the guns were licensed. Details are provided in "The theft of firearms", Home Office Research and Planning Unit Paper No. 84, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the timetable for claims under each of the options under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 to be *(a)* approved and *(b)* paid out; and what consideration will be given to claims submitted late; [22087]

(2) how many claims for compensation he received under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 under claim options A, B and C in the month the legislation took effect and in each subsequent month until the deadline occurred; how many claims in each category were received late; how many claims for compensation under each of the options have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* paid out in each of the months since the Act took effect; and for each figure what percentage of the total this represents. [22086]

Mr. Michael: It has always been recognised that the pressure of claims received over the short hand-in period was bound to involve time in processing, and claimants were advised that they may have to wait several weeks before receiving any payment.

Most claims under Options A and B will have been dealt with before the end of March; regular payments on Option C claims will have begun by then. Some dealers who have claimed under Option C have already received at least one interim payment. Under the terms of the Scheme the deadline for the surrender of handguns to the appropriate police force was 30 September 1997, although claims continue to be received in the Home Office Firearms Compensation Section in respect of items surrendered by that date. These will be considered in the normal way. No claims can be accepted in respect of items surrendered after 30 September 1997.

As at 12 December 1997, 39,896 claims have been received and 23,183 payments made, as follows:

Month	*Number of claims received*	*Number of payments made*	*Payments as a percentage of claims received*
July	7,514	351	4.7
August	11,117	2,602	15.9
September	13,387	4,091	22.0
October	6,407	7,646	38.2
November	1,225	5,483	50.9
1–12 December	246	3,010	58.2
Total	39,836	23,183	

With the exception of a few interim payments to dealers under Option C, all payments are under Options A and B of the Scheme. The totals include payments under the ex gratia scheme for the surrender of small calibre pistols. Payment is normally made immediately after a claim has been authorised.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish the whereabouts of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom whose addresses are not known to the authorities. [21844]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 19 December 1997]:* The onus is on the individual applicant to maintain proper contact with the Home Office: a failure to do so could result in the application being refused for non-compliance with the procedures. If it appears that an individual is likely to abscond, consideration will be given to the use of detention. Those granted temporary admission to the United Kingdom will usually be subject to restrictions requiring them to reside at a fixed address and to report as necessary to a police station or immigration office. Where individuals do abscond, their details are circulated widely and immigration officers are tasked with tracing them.

Racially Motivated Crime

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racially motivated crimes in the Greater London area have been reported during 1997; and if he will make a statement. [21888]

Mr. Michael: Racial incidents figures are submitted by each police force to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary at the end of each financial year. The incidents are recorded under the Association of Chief Police Officers' definition of a racial incident:

"any incident in which it appears to the reporting or investigating officer that the complaint involves an element of racial motivation, or any incident which includes an allegation of racial motivation made by any person".

Precise figures for the Greater London area are not available because that area is not exactly coterminous with police force areas. However, the number of racial incidents recorded by the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police during 1996–97 is 5,631. This is higher than the 1995–96 figure (5,013), which reflects a general increase in the number of racial incidents recorded by the police in England and Wales.

It is difficult to be precise about the extent to which rising figures may be partly due to increasing willingness among ethnic minority communities to report these incidents and an increasing confidence that the police service take these matters seriously. Police forces are also taking steps to increase the reporting rate of racial incidents to derive a better picture of the type of incidents taking place, and to discover when and where they are taking place and on whom. Such developments are also likely to be influencing both public confidence and the number of offences reported.

Citizenship Applications

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that persons whose applications for British citizenship are being refused are given the reasons for such decisions. [22439]

Mr. Straw: Yes. This Government believe in greater openness in public administration, as we showed last week when we published the White Paper on the Freedom of Information Bill. This openness is especially necessary where our decisions affect the rights of individuals. I have long been unhappy with the practice not to give reasons when refusing some applications for British citizenship, and relying upon section 44(2) of the British Nationality Act 1981 as the authority for not doing so. Since taking office in May, I have considered this matter in considerable detail. I am required to give reasons in a wide range of immigration cases and I can see no persuasive argument why my decisions involving the refusal of British citizenship should not similarly be open to public scrutiny. I have therefore decided as a matter of principle that henceforth reasons should be given in such cases.

One immediate consequence of this decision concerns the appeal to the House or Lords from the Court of Appeal in the cases of R *v* Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Mohamed Abdel Moneim Fayed and ex parte Ali Fayed regarding the application of section 44(2). I have today instructed the Treasury Solicitor that these appeals should be withdrawn. The effect of this is that the judgment of the Court of Appeal quashing the decisions made in 1995 to refuse these two applications now stands.

It will now fall to me to decide the applications on Mohamed and Ali Fayed, on their merits, and I cannot comment upon them further at this stage. I should also make clear that, in reaching the decision on principle that reasons should be given in citizenship cases, I have not considered any of the original papers in the Fayeds' application.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 4 and 5 December. [22440]

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend and I represented the United Kingdom at the Council, together with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department. The main matters dealt with were as follows:

The Council agreed as "A" points, among other things, a resolution on marriages of convenience, the organisation of future work on revising the Brussels and Lugano Conventions on recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial, civil and commercial matters, and a joint action on a mechanism for evaluation of the fight against organised crime. Several regulations relating to Europol were also agreed, dealing with its computer system, its budget for 1998 and its relationship with third countries and international organisations.

Political agreement was reached on a text of the "Brussels II" Convention on jurisdiction, recognition and enforcement of judgments in family matters. The Convention will enhance procedures for the recognition of marriages, divorces and adoptions within the European Union. The text will now be

considered further, taking into account any views expressed by the European Parliament, with a view to signature of the Convention by June 1998.

The scope of the draft Convention on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters was discussed. This Convention covers the giving and receiving of assistance and evidence during criminal investigations and prosecutions. The Council agreed that the Convention would not contain provisions on cross-border investigation techniques, which could be the subject of a separate Protocol, along with provisions on search and seizure. Initial negotiations on the terms of the Protocol could begin under the United Kingdom Presidency, before the Convention itself was finalised.

Discussion on the draft convention on enforcement of driving disqualifications revealed that a number of member states had unresolved problems which required further work. Progress on the Action Plan on Organised Crime was noted. Two elements in particular were touched on: finalisation of the Naples II Convention on mutual assistance and co-operation between customs administrations, which is due to be signed before the end of the year, and ratification by all member states of the Europol Convention, which is on course for early 1998.

The Council took stock of the position reached on the draft joint action to establish a European judicial network, which seeks to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of current arrangements for requesting and granting mutual legal assistance through a network of contact points. It was agreed that member states would notify the Council informally of the contact points which they intended to nominate, pending a decision at the next meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in March 1998.

Some progress was made on the draft joint action on making it a criminal offence to participate in a criminal organisation. A number of difficulties still remain, particularly concerning the definition of the conduct to be criminalised. The joint action was remitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further work.

The Council agreed a draft joint action establishing a funding programme for training, visits and exchanges in the fight against organised crime (the FALCONE programme). The Council also approved a report on organised crime in the European Union in 1996, for submission to the European Council.

The Council took stock of the position reached on a draft resolution on a strategic action plan for customs co-operation in the Third Pillar. In the absence of agreement on the territorial application of the resolution, the Council instructed the Committee of Permanent Representatives to find a solution.

The Council approved a report on the internal and external threat from terrorism, for submission to the European Council; took note of a draft report to the European council on drugs; and approved a report for the European Council on implementation of the joint action of December 1996 on approximation of laws and practices to combat drugs.

The Council agreed in principle to amend the definition in the Europol Convention of "trafficking in human beings" so as to include trafficking in the child pornography. This was necessary to enable the Europol Drugs Unit to collect and analyse data on the subject. At the request of one member state, the K4 Committee was instructed to ensure that Europol's remit was extended to cover terrorism as soon as possible, and at latest within two years of Europol beginning its work.

The Council agreed that a further action plan should be drawn up making specific proposals for countering a recent increase in illegal immigration from Iraq. Justice and Interior Ministers would take stock of progress when they met informally in Birmingham at the end of January.

The Council discussed the draft EURODAC Convention for exchange and comparison of the fingerprints of asylum seekers. Agreement was reached in principle on some outstanding questions concerning the storage and erasure of data under the Convention. The working group will now begin drawing up the technical specifications for the system.

The Council also discussed a draft joint action establishing a programme for training, exchanges and co-operation in the fields of immigration, asylum and the crossing of external frontiers (the Odysseus programme). In the absence of agreement on the provisions concerning crossing of external frontiers, the Council remitted the issue to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further consideration.

The Council held meetings, as part of the Structured Dialogue, with Ministers of the associated Central and Eastern European countries (CEEs) and, separately, with Cyprus. Discussion with the CEEs centred on mutual legal assistance, particularly in the areas of extradition, money laundering and the Lugano Convention on jurisdiction and enforcement of judgements in civil and commercial matters. The question of illegal immigration from Iraq was also raised, as well as asylum matters. In the meeting with Cyprus, Ministers from Cyprus set out the measures that it had taken to combat money laundering and described the position in Cyprus with regard to illegal immigration and Iraqi refugees.

At the Council, the Luxembourg Presidency hosted an informal joint lunch of Justice and Health Ministers to exchange views on drugs matters. The discussion highlighted the range of measures currently taken within member states to combat drugs abuse and the value to be obtained from the exchange of information and ideas.

Tobacco (Identity Cards)

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidelines to independent retailers of tobacco on establishing whether a customer is aged over 16 years; and if he will encourage the introduction of an ID card system for young people wishing to purchase tobacco. [22222]

Mr. Michael: Guidelines were issued to local authorities in 1992 on the application of the Children and Young Person (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 and we have no plans to change that guidance. It is for the retailer to ensure that the person to whom cigarettes are sold is not under the age of 16, but if they are in any doubt about their responsibilities they can contact their local Trading Standards Officer who has responsibility for enforcing the 1991 Act. The retailer will have a defence to any possible prosecution if he can show that he took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid committing the offence. The Government are encouraging the use of voluntary "proof of age" cards produced by the Portman Group in respect of licensed premises and would be interested in any comparable proposals by the industry in the context of young people wishing to purchase tobacco.

Police Act 1997

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to have completed drafts of the regulations referred to in subsection 4 of section 115 of the Police Act 1997. [22365]

Mr. Michael: We are currently reviewing the provisions relating to criminal records checks in Part V of the Police Act 1997. Our top priority in doing so is the protection of children and other vulnerable people. We shall consider the possible introduction of regulations under this section during the course of the review.

Mr. Farrakhan

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his review of his predecessor's decision to deny Mr. Farrakhan permission to visit the United Kingdom. [20304]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have asked for the views of a range of interested parties, as well as those of Mr. Farrakhan himself, before deciding whether to maintain the exclusion. Representations both in support of and against Mr. Farrakhan's continued exclusion have been received and need to be carefully considered before a decision is made. The final outcome is not expected to be known for several weeks.

Prisoner Statistics

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of *(a)* male prisoners held, *(b)* male deaths in prison and *(c)* male suicides in prison in each of the last 10 years; and how many in each of the categories in each year were (i) on remand and (ii) convicted prisoners. [22117]

Ms. Quin: I will write to the hon. Member.

Crime (Witnesses and Victims)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who determines the level of accommodation and support afforced to victims of crime who are being offered official protection; and on what guidance he relies for that determination; [21939]

(2) how many witnesses to crime, receiving official protection, were housed in local authority accommodation in each of the past five years; and how many are currently in such accommodation; [21934]

(3) how much was spent on official protection of victims of crime in each of the past five financial years; and what is the budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; [21937]

(4) how much was spent on official protection of witnesses to crime in each of the past five financial years; and what is the budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; [21936]

(5) how many *(a)* witnesses to crimes and *(b)* victims of crimes were offered official protection in each of the past five years; [21938]

(6) who determines the level of accommodation and support afforded to witnesses to crime who are being offered official protection; and on what guidance they rely for that determination; [21940]

(7) how many victims of crime, receiving official protection, were housed in local authority accommodation in each of the past five years; and how many are currently in such accommodation. [21935]

Mr. Michael: Measures to help protect witnesses who are likely to suffer from intimidation are currently being considered by the inter-departmental review of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses which was announced by my right hon. Friend on 13 June 1997. I understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers is also looking at this issue with a view to developing national guidelines.

Until now, information on the protection of *(a)* witnesses to crime and *(b)* victims of crime has not been collected centrally. The allocation of resources, including the provision of accommodation, is a matter for chief officers of police and local housing authorities. There is no national scheme for the protection of witnesses in this country so whether to offer protection in any particular instance is a decision for the chief officer of the force concerned.

In the 1994 British Crime Survey (BCS), victims and witnesses of crime were asked whether they had suffered any harassment or intimidation as a result, and whether they had reported this to the police. Although we cannot tell how many people were offered assistance or protection as a result, the figures give a maximum estimate for the number of crime incidents in which victims may require protection. The 1994 BCS estimated that a minimum of 6 per cent. of all crime incidents in 1993 led to intimidation of the victim (about one million incidents). The victim reported this intimidation to the police in 23 per cent. of such incidents. Therefore, a rough estimate of the number of such incidents reported to the police in 1993 was 250,000. However, only a small proportion of intimidated witnesses and victims would be suitable and willing for high level protection schemes which are expensive and require major life changes such as moving home and severing connections with the past.

Of respondents to the 1994 BCS, 27 per cent. had witnessed at least one of four crimes (vandalism, burglary, car crime or assault) in the last five years. Intimidation of witnesses was rare. Of those who witnessed any of the four crimes, only 4 per cent. experienced intimidation. Witnesses reported intimidation to the police in 39 per cent. of cases. It is not possible to derive a number of incidents.

Police Drivers

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amount of money spent on the training of police drivers in each police authority for each year since 1991. [21789]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with the information that is currently available and an explanation of the issues involved, and will place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Crime and Disorder Bill

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to introduce provisions in the Crime and Disorder Bill for financial penalties on statutory agencies for failure to meet time limits in individual cases. [21931]

Mr. Michael: No. However, the courts will be able to enforce statutory time limits by making use of their existing power to impose 'wasted costs orders', which are applicable to both prosecution and defence. The Government's recent consultation paper "Tackling Delays in the Youth Justice System" set out the possible advantages and disadvantages of using financial penalties on statutory agencies to enforce time limits in individual cases and asked for views on this point. Over 85 per cent.

of those who expressed a view on the merits of such penalties opposed their introduction or expressed significant concerns. Respondents pointed out in particular that contested penalties might lead to further delays and damage the inter-agency co-operation which is critical to tackling delays. In the light of the response to the consultation paper, we have decided not to introduce any provision in the Crime and Disorder Bill for financial penalties on statutory agencies for failure to meet time limits in individual cases.

We are also looking very closely at other means of promoting efficiency within the youth justice system. In particular, as set out in the White Paper "No More Excuses" (Cmnd 3809) we will be introducing performance targets, which will operate in parallel with statutory time limits but will be more exacting. We will judge performance across the youth justice system in relation to these targets. The Youth Justice Board, which is to be established under the Crime and Disorder Bill, will also be able to publish information about performance across the youth justice system, and we believe that this will be an effective means of promoting accountability and give a strong incentive to better performance.

WPC Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *441*, what report he has received from Commander David Venness in relation to investigations into the murder of WPC Fletcher. [20161]

Mr. Straw: The police investigation into the murder of Woman Police Constable Fletcher is continuing. The police inquiries will be completed as soon as is practicable, and I expect to receive a report at that point.

Magistrates Courts Rules

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the provisions in the magistrates courts rules which may prevent or discourage magistrates from questioning defendants about the reasons for their behaviour before reaching a final decision on sentencing. [21930]

Mr. Michael: It is the Government's intention positively to encourage magistrates to question defendants about the reasons for their behaviour as part of our plans to make offenders accountable for their actions and to make them participants rather than passive observers in court proceedings which affect them. The White Paper "No More Excuses: A New Approach to Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales" (Cmnd 3809) set out the Government's intention to remove any obstacles in the Magistrates' Courts Rules which may prevent or discourage magistrates from questioning defendants in the Youth Court about the reasons for their behaviour, before reaching a final decision on sentencing. Specifically, the Government intend to review the Rules to determine *(a)* whether there are any such obstacles on the face of the Rules; *(b)* whether in practice any of the Rules are regarded as inhibiting dialogue with the defendant; and *(c)* whether the existing Rules should be clarified or extended to encourage magistrates to question defendants about the reasons for their behaviour in order that this can inform decisions about sentencing. Until this review is completed, it is not possible to list the provisions of the Rules which may prevent or discourage magistrates from questioning defendants about the reasons for their behaviour before reaching a final decision on sentencing.

Police (Sickness)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police force, the cost of sickness in each of the past five financial years and the cost to date in the current financial year. [21933]

Mr. Michael: This information is not available. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, in its report on The Management of Sickness Absence and Medical Retirement in the Police Service, published on 16 December this year, estimates the total cost at £210 million a year, and recommends that police forces should in future cost sickness absence on the basis of a common formula.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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